

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

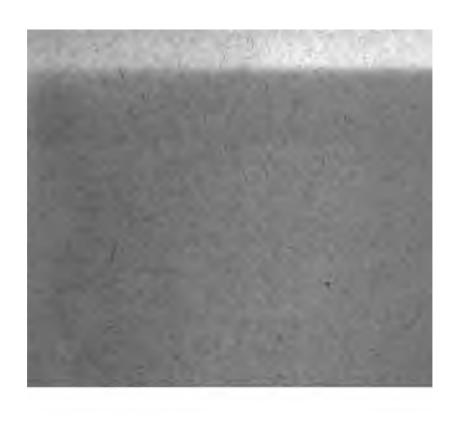
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/







•

•

.

•

.

.

THE BRIDGE ACROSS

BY L. ALLEN HARKER

THE BRIDGE ACROSS

MONTAGU WYCHERLY

ALLEGRA

CHILDREN OF THE DEAR COTSWOLDS

JAN AND HER JOB

THE FFOLLIOTS OF REDMARLEY

MISS ESPERANCE AND MR. WYCHERLY

MR. WYCHERLY'S WARDS

MASTER AND MAID

CONCERNING PAUL AND FIAMMETTA

A ROMANCE OF THE NURSERY

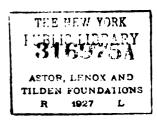
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

THE BRIDGE ACROSS

BY

L. ALLEN HARKER

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1921



COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published November, 1921

PRINTED AT
THE SCRIBNER PRESS
NEW YORK, U. S. A.



то

"Pussy"

"Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble dew."
R. L. S.

August 17th, 1921.

343

•

.

CONTENTS

PART I

		RABY					
I.	Gran .	•	•	•	•		PAGE
II.	Raby .			•	•		9
III.	Concerning	Vere	KER \	/ERDO	ON	•	18
IV.	RETROSPECTIO	N		•	•	•	26
V.	FATHER AND	Daug	HTER		•	•	33
VI.	Reflections		•		•		42
VII.	ENTER AUSTI	N			•	•	52
VIII.	Interplay					•	62
IX.	THE OUTER V	Vorli	тиІ с	RUDE	s.	•	71
X.	Concerning "	'In-L	AWS"	•	•	•	81
XI.	RESULTS		•	•			92
XII.	VEREKER IS I	Rouse	ED	•	•	•	104
	P.	ART	II				
	THE LAST (OF TH	E DYI	YASTY	?		
XIII.	Miss Gransm	ORE			•		117
XIV.	Тне Номесон	MING					132
XV.	Tension .	vii	•	•			142

viii CONTENTS								
CHAPTER XVI.	THE SNAP					•	PAGE ISI	
XVII.	A Proposition	N	•		•	•	162	
XVIII.	New Lamps	•				•	180	
XIX.	CHANGE .				•		190	
XX.	THE YEARS B	ETWE	EN		•		202	
PART III CHUMLEIGH GRAY								
XXI.	1918 .	•	•		•		209	
XXII.	THE LIGHTER	Side	of W	Var	•	•	218	
XXIII.	THE WEB	•	•		•	•	231	
XXIV.	Incompatibili	TY	•	•			238	
XXV.	Cross Curre	nts	•	•		•	243	
XXVI.	Letters .	•	•	•			262	
XXVII.	FLINT AND ST	EEL	•	•		•	267	
XXVIII.	THE BRIDGE	Holds	3 .		•	•	277	
XXIX.	An End and	a Be	GINNI	NG		•	290	

PART I RABY

THE BRIDGE ACROSS

CHAPTER I

GRAN

SUNDAY morning in late April.

Church.

Matins.

A dull matins without any choir, for the church is high, and the choristers only sing at the 9.30 choral Eucharist.

The curate was reading the Psalms in the monotonous mumble seemingly reserved by the clergy for such religious exercises. The congregation hurried after him, like a stumbling child after a long-legged, striding parent.

There was a sound of pattering feet in the aisle which stopped at the seat just behind Gran. Then followed a hasty kneeling and uprisal, intermittent whispers, and breathless giggles.

Most disturbing little noises, which cut sharply across the decorous murmur of the congregation.

The Psalms were long that day, and about threequarters of the way through Gran turned right round to gaze reprovingly at the irreverent ones.

Three girls were in the seat. Two of them, perhaps, nearing twenty. Tall, fair and pretty in a rather rakish, musical-comedy fashion. They had the grace to look confused, and bent their blue eyes upon their prayer-books.

The third, who stood between them, might have

been anything from eleven to fourteen; and it was clear that she was the disturbing element, for her personality was like the clash of cymbals.

Gran's mind rather resembled a sensitive plate. Instantly the child's face was unforgettably photographed upon it. A strong face, with dark, delicate, level eyebrows, vivid colouring and bright, large, brown eyes that met Gran's mildly reproving glance with a stare, insolent in its instant challenge, as, without actually grimacing, she thrust out a small red tongue as far as it would go.

A pointedly emphatic tongue that silently expressed infinite derision and "don't-care-ness."

Gran longed to look behind her again. She always fell a thrall to beauty; but really that child was dreadfully rude.

In church too!

After that the giggles ceased. There was only an occasional whisper and soft, sighing fidgets during the curate's sermon. And all the time Gran was conscious of keen, inimical young eyes that seemed to pierce through the thick coils of her greying hair, right into her brain; conveying all sorts of unspoken messages to the effect that she was "an interfering old thing"; "a prying old cat"; "a . . ." "And I'm none of these things," Gran's mind retorted indignantly. "I could be quite good friends with you, you beautiful child, if you'd let me—but would you?"

"And now . . ." The curate had finished at last, and gave out the hymn, George Herbert's "King of Love."

The organist played it through, and high above the voices of the congregation rose the pure impersonal treble of the little girl in the seat behind. She sang like a boy-angel "choiring among the youngeyed cherubim" and as, hitherto, she had taken no part in the service except to whisper when she ought not—the effect was somewhat startling.

Outside in the sunny Market-Place Mrs. Chester and two guests sat in her car awaiting Mr. Chester, who was standing a few yards off in earnest conversation with her of the treble voice. She had taken him by the arm and appeared to be clinging to him with obtrustive affection.

"Who is that child talking to Jim?" Gran asked, after greeting Mrs. Chester. She threw out her hands in a gesture expressive of helplessness— "That, my dear, is Raby Verdon, the Problem of the Place. The poor child has had no chance"she spoke low and hurriedly—"her father's a dreadful man, quite impossible. I'll tell you all about them some other time. They're your nearest neighbours, too. So if you can get hold of the child . . . Jim! you must come. Don't keep him now, Raby dear, we really must get home. Come here though just a minute, I want you to know this

Raby loosed the clasping hands on Mr. Chester's arm: "I must fly, too," she called, and hurried up the street after her two friends.

"Baggage," Mr. Chester muttered as he wound up the car. "Does she ever do one single thing she's told?"

"You're sure to come across her," Mrs. Chester said to Gran as they drove off. "Do what you can."

Her brothers had christened her "Gran" when she was four years old, and the name stuck. When at nineteen she married Cecil Underwood, the promis4 RABY

ing young Indian Civilian, he, too, called her Gran. Her intimate friends all called her Gran: and now that she was in the late forties and a gran in fact, the only people who didn't call her Gran were comparative strangers, her own daughter, and her

daughter's husband.

"My nearest neighbours," she reflected as she strolled home. Then they must live at Leadon Hall, the big red house she had noticed only yesterday when she wandered down a lane, and found it was a cul de sac leading to somebody's drive gates. The drive was straight, bordered by tall beech-trees, and away in the distance the house looked kind and friendly with its gables and steep stone roof.

A pity they were impossible. Only nice people

should live in such houses.

"I hope I'm nice," she thought, "for I've got a perfect darling of a house myself."

And she smiled at it happily as she saw it at the end of the two rows of irregularly-built old cottages that fringe the Roman road leading out of Casterly.

With satisfaction she remarked her own bathsponge sitting happily sunning itself in her bedroom window. A comfortable Sunday smell of roasting meat came from every cottage as she passed. How benevolent her little old house looked as she came nearer; set broadside-on, so that it faced down the street instead of standing side by side with the cottages.

There were daffodils and hyacinths blooming in the front garden, with its stone path to the door between two squares of grass. Through another door, in a wall at the side of the house, she went into the big garden. Here were more daffodils and jonquils and early tulips, and slender swaying things in green hoods and green cloaks, for all the world as though they were just setting off to a party. In a week or two they would arrive: the sheaths would be discarded, and they would show their lovely faces and entrancing frocks.

She went and stood in the middle of the lawn and looked back at her house. Yes: the side was even more friendly than the front. So she kissed her hand to it. And as for the garden, with its wide flowerbeds, old espalier trees and loose grey walls—it was adorable. Even without the stream it would have been adorable, but with the stream it was irresistible, and the stream embroidered all one side. No one who lives by running water can be deaf to its siren song. A charming idler, itself, a stream is the most insidious cause of dawdling in others. Like a pretty woman it expects you to look at it. Every day it wears a new dress and different ornaments. The more you look, the more you want to look, and no custom can stale its infinite variety.

Gran hadn't been a month in her house yet, so of course she went to look at the stream. It's the same stream that, in the grounds of Leadon Hall, widens out into quite a respectable little river, and inevitably it carried Gran's thoughts to Raby.

There are big trees along the path that borders it on the other side, and in one of them Gran saw a sudden flash of red; a bushy tail; a momentary peep of an impudent bright-eyed face... and the squirrel was gone.

"Rather like that child," she thought, and hoped that Mrs. Chester would come soon and tell her all the story. So deep in thought was she that she never heard Mrs. Bannister thumping the gong to announce lunch, and Bannister, himself, had to come to the stream to look for her.

As he respectfully touched his head—he hadn't a

6 RABY

hat—and murmured that "luncheon was served" she wondered once more at her stupendous luck.

For the Bannisters went with the house. Both house and Bannisters belonged to her second brother, who had just gone back to India after two years' furlough. One only precious son was left behind at a preparatory school, and her brother had given her the house and the servants, that the boy might have his own home to come to in the holidays.

"But suppose," she said, when the scheme was first mooted, "suppose the Bannisters want to leave—what shall I do?"

"They won't leave unless you do something outrageous, they're not that sort. For one thing they're devoted to Johnny. You let them run you and you'll never know a moment's discomfort. Don't fuss them. Don't interfere, and you'll bless the day you came to Little Leadon. I've had eighteen months of them and I know."

"It sounds delightful, my dear, but you know servants never feel quite the same to ladies . . . they don't seem to like them so much."

"You try them. If you can't get on—well, they must go—and you'll have all the infernal bother of looking for other servants. All I ask is—don't make up your mind it's going to be a failure till you've tried. I want them kept for me and I trust to you to do it."

Not without cause did her brother believe in Gran. She came, she saw, and she surrendered to the beneficent sway of the Bannisters.

Mrs. Bannister was small and swift and neat as a polyanthus. She was a first-class cook and had "lived" in big houses and the best "families," and, as cook-housekeeper, had had "as many as a dozen

GRAN

servants under her." There was nothing about a house that Mrs. Bannister did not understand and do.

Bannister met her in one of the said big houses where at the kennels he was first whip. All his life before he had had to do with horses, but one very soft season he got wet through and rode home in his wet clothes once too often. "He got it in the back," and the doctors said he must have a change of work.

He married; and his wise little wife decided that they'd look for "a little place" together "with no bothering maids." Gran's brother, John Gray, had just bought Little Leadon and was looking for a housekeeper. A kind friend put him in touch with the Bannisters and they fitted as though they had grown there.

Like his wife, Bannister was extremely neat in his dress—soft of speech and courteous: with the wise gentleness that occasionally permeates men who have had much to do with horses.

Gardening, he said, was "in his family." He gave his heart to Little Leadon garden; and Little Leadon garden responded, as gardens always do to those that love them.

He did all sorts of jobs in the house to help his wife and he valeted his master in such fashion that John Gray almost ceased to lament his Mahommedan boy.

After two years of London lodgings, ladies' clubs, and service flats, Gran simply floated in the serene atmosphere of efficiency that surrounded the Bannisters. She, too, knew what it was to mourn the lost ayah and solicitous soortie; and no one who has lived long years in India really wants to interfere much in the running of a house. Nearly all have learned the wisdom of the saying—

8 RABY

"Is a little oil spilled? Is a little corn stolen? This is the price of tranquillity."

In Mrs. Bannister's case not a spoonful was spilled,

nor a grain wasted, far less stolen!

Gran perceived this in a very short time. Therefore she floated, and praised God from Whom all blessings flow . . . most especially for the Bannisters.

CHAPTER II

RABY

It was such a warm April day that, after lunch, she sat writing letters in the window that looks out on to the garden. An ordinary sash window only about a foot and a half from the ground. And she opened it from the bottom as far as it would go, for she loved the smell of the jonquils and the growing grass. Grass in April has an exquisite smell.

She was writing to her brother, telling him all about her joy in Johnny, who had just gone back to school; and how she delighted in the house and the Bannisters.

Absorbed in her letter she heard nothing, when a shadow fell across her paper, and she looked up to see that Raby Verdon was sitting on the window ledge.

She almost held her breath, fearing that if she so much as moved Raby would vanish like the squirrel.

But Raby didn't seem in the least disposed to vanish. She smiled at Gran, showing strong white teeth: and the brown eyes that met Gran's were no longer mocking and inimical, but full of a friendly curiosity.

"I've never seen into this room before," she announced. "I've always wanted to. I guessed you lived here when I saw you this morning."

"Won't you come in?" Gran asked.

"I'm quite comfortable where I am, thank you. I suppose Mrs. Chester told you my name—what's yours?"

"Esther Underwood."

"Miss or Mrs.?"

"Mrs."

"Oh, you are a 'Mrs.' then. I rather wondered if you were an old maid when you glared at me so in church. Have you got any children?"

Again Gran was reminded of the squirrel for Raby's bright head bobbed in time to her questions and while she waited for an answer it was poised on one side.

"Yes, one daughter."

"Only one?"

"Only one."

"Is she here?"

"No."

"Is she like you?"

"Not a bit."

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Oh . . . quite old. . . . How awfully old you must be to have such an old daughter."

"I suppose I am," sighed Gran, "but I don't feel

old, you know."

"The worst of old people is they're nearly always cross—I suppose they can't help it, but they are."

"Is that your experience? Don't you know any

old people who aren't cross?"

"Well . . . Bates isn't—never to me. But old women are crosser than old men. . . . I wonder why?"

"It's never safe to generalise about crossness,"

Gran said.

"Where's your daughter? Is she here?"

"No, she's with her husband."

"Oh, she's married, is she? What's her husband?—is he a Master of Hounds?"

"No, he's a clergyman."

"Good Lord! I shouldn't like to be married to a clergyman."

"Is that why you invoke the Deity?" Gran asked mildly.

Raby leaned right in to stare at her: "You talk rather like my father," she said.

Gran didn't answer. She could not feel it was a compliment, in the light of Mrs. Chester's information.

"He takes you up just like that," Raby went on. "Talks with long words and sounds very polite, and then before you can say 'knife' he's swearing at you like a Tom cat."

"I assure you I don't swear," Gran said earnestly.

"Not with your mouth perhaps, but you do with your eyes; you did to me in church."

"Indeed I didn't," Gran protested. "I looked at you because you were disturbing the rest of us—that's very different from swearing."

"You're not a bad old thing—I can see that," Raby remarked tolerantly, "but I'd like you to tell me this—honest Injun, mind—do you really believe God minded because I whispered to Lil and Babs, do you suppose He minded the least little bit?"

Gran looked thoughtful. "No," she confessed, "if you put it that way, I don't suppose He did. But all the same one has no right to be a nuisance to other people, and we don't go to church to whisper to our friends."

"I suppose you were awfully shocked?"

"Oh dear, no! I've seen lots of ill-bred little girls in my day."

This time it was Raby who looked pensive. The

qualification evidently rankled.

"But you minded?"

"No," said Gran, "there you're wrong. I disapproved. I didn't mind, because really it was no business of mine."

"But you'd have minded if you liked me," Raby

persisted, and her voice was wistful.

Gran was touched at once: "I think I must have minded then, for I do like you."

"Did you like Lil and Babs too?"

"Are they your sisters?"

"Good gracious, no! I should think they weren't. There were Verdons," Raby said solemnly, "in Doomsday Book. Lil and Babs' name's Pike. Their father kept a garage, mind you, not even a livery-stable, in Clerkenwell—wherever that is. That's what their father was; he's dead now."

"Yet it seemed to me," Gran continued, callously ignoring the demise of the paternal Pike, "that Lil and Babs behaved better in church than the descend-

ant of the Verdons in Doomsday Book."

"I know what you're going to say," Raby cried, holding up an emphatic finger. "I know perfittly well, and it's what my father calls a cliché. You're going to say something about 'Noblesse oblige'—now aren't you? Own up!"

Gran blushed guiltily. "You're right. I was, but I shan't now. As you realise it . . . that's . . ."

"But I don't," Raby interrupted. "The Verdons in Doomsday Book had a little wee farm. I don't suppose their manners and behaviour were so very

beautiful. They got a bit richer afterwards—probably, my father says, by stealing their neighbours' horses and cows. None of them were particularly good that I've ever heard of, so where does 'oblige' come in?"

"Yet you seem proud of them?"

"Well, they're there, you see. You can't get past 'em." Raby lolled half in half out of the window. Her long legs (with holes in the knees of both stockings) drawn up to her chin. Her bright, watchful eyes fixed on Gran, as though weighing her in some delicate, intangible balance.

A thrush was singing in a lilac tree and the sun touched Raby's hair till it glowed like a chestnut that had just burst its sheath.

"Won't you come inside?" Gran asked. "It's nearly tea-time, and I shall be so pleased if you'll have it with me."

Raby swung her long legs into the room, bumped her head on the bottom of the window and stood tall and straight in front of Gran's desk.

"I'd like that," she said eagerly. "I smell hot cakes. . . . I very seldom go inside any houses. People here don't like us much, and they're afraid of me corrupting their children. They think us awful. They're shocked if you like."

"It's you who seem to like it."

"Sometimes it's fun and sometimes it's beastly; but don't let's talk any more about that. I'm going to be good now. This has been an exciting week. Wednesday," here she began to count on her fingers, displaying not over-clean hands, "Bates took me to the Cinema. He doesn't care much for it, but I love it. Thursday, he let me take Boston over the jumps in the paddock—like a bird he went. Friday, Biddy

took me to be fitted for my new breeches; I've grown out of the ones I've got. Saturday, I had my hair cut and singed and shampooed. And Sunday—to-day—I went to church with Lil and Babs, and now I've come to have tea with you. Different people every single day—isn't that gay?"

Gran felt a queer tightening in her throat, for suddenly she realised that however tall and impudent Raby might be, she was still a child and a lonely

child at that.

"Have you no sisters or brothers of your own?" she asked.

"Brothers! I should think I just haven't. Why, that's what all the bother's about. Father is so unlucky in his breeding. Always fillies when he wanted colts. Rotten bad luck he's had."

Gran gasped: "I don't quite understand. . . .

Do you mean in the stud . . . or what?"

"The stud's right enough when he doesn't race. He always loses a pot of money when he races his own horses. I mean he's so unlucky in his children, you know. Always girls . . . and if your people are in Doomsday Book, and your place is entailed, you want a son most awfully. After I came he gave it up as a bad job and went all anyhow. I suppose it was very sickening for him: but I couldn't help it—could I?"

"Then you have sisters?"

Raby held out her hand palm downwards with a dramatic gesture, as though she were dropping something: "Dead—all dead—five of 'em one after the other—little she-babies."

"That," Gran said, "must indeed have been embittering: and how dreadfully sad for your poor mother!..."

"She wasn't my mother," Raby interposed hastily. "That was his first. My mother died when I came as a girl, and that did upset him."

"I should think so," Gran murmured faintly, much depressed by these startling revelations. "However," she added, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "you didn't die—so that's something."

"Precious little," Raby rejoined gloomily as she rubbed one foot over the other. "I'm a girl, you

see. I can't inherit."

"Is Leadon Hall a very old house?" Gran asked.
"It may be, I don't know. It's not ours anyway,
only rented. Father would never live in his own
place after I disappointed him so—because of the
entail. We're always moving. He's let it for
twenty-five years."

Here Mrs. Bannister appeared with tea. When she saw Raby she seemed to radiate astonished disapproval though she was deft, noiseless and silent as usual.

"Would you like to wash your hands?" Gran asked.

"I expect you'd like me to," Raby replied with unexpected meekness. "It was the tree did it, and my stockings, they were all right when I started, but I saw a squirrel in the drive and I had to go up after it, but of course it had gone."

"I saw a squirrel, too," said Gran, "and it reminded

me of you. Come!"

She held out her hand and Raby put hers into it: "I'm nearly as tall as you," she said, "and I don't think you can be quite as old as you look."

Raby was hungry. She ate innumerable hot cakes and then went on to jam sandwiches. Gran noted with approval that her table manners were not bad

16 RABY,

and that she didn't try to talk with her mouth full, and as her mouth generally was full Gran did most of the talking.

At length Raby's hunger seemed appeased. She stretched her long legs, leant back in her chair and clasped her hands behind her head.

"I like you," she said suddenly. "I'm sorry I put out my tongue at you. I didn't know then you

were so decent."

Gran flushed like a girl. "My dear," she said, "who takes care of you? Do you have a governess?—or do you go to school?"

"A governess!" Raby repeated ironically. "I've had dozens of governesses. They're like the Kings of England and their wives."

"How do you come to have had so many?"

"Well, partly it's me and partly it's father. If she's young and nice-looking he's after her, and if she likes it, next day he decides she's no fit companion for me—and so she goes at once. And if she doesn't like it, she goes at once of her own accord. And if she's old and frumpy, he says she's too long in the tooth, or her eyes bulge, or she moves like a Flanders mare or something . . . but generally she can't stick me for more than a fortnight . . . and so it goes on. Just now I'm having a rest. I say, what are you looking so blue for?"

"Because I'm sorry for the poor governesses."

"Sorry for the poor governesses!" Raby repeated in astonishment. "I'd have thought you'd be sorry for poor me, always chopping and changing and never learning much. My father, even, says, 'Raby, I pity you, I pity you from the bottom of my heart, but it's a damned inconsequent world."

"It certainly seems so," Gran agreed, "but I can't

see where you're to be pitied, if you, yourself, make it so difficult for the old and frumpy ones who could probably teach you quite a lot."

"I was waiting for you to say 'hush' when I said 'damned.' Why didn't you?" Raby asked in a

distinctly disappointed tone.

"I thought you were quoting."

"So I was, but people generally get ever so flustered when I quote father. They'd be a jolly sight more flustered if they could hear him. He has a flow."

"I don't think it's quite loyal of you to say things like that about your father."

Raby sat up very straight: "Perhaps you're right," she acknowledged. "You mustn't think he's always cross, for he isn't. Sometimes he's quite jolly and amusing."

"Perhaps," Gran suggested charitably, "you think

he's cross, when he's only sad-really."

Raby smiled and shook her head: "Lots of people have said that. He'd call it a cliché just like noblesse oblige. It won't wash. He's got a devil of a temper, and that's that. But he can be an angel sometimes, so interesting."

The clock struck six. Raby got up. "I'll come again," she promised, "but I really must go now, else they'll be scouring the country for me. Bates and Biddy are such fuss-pots. Good-bye and thank-you for tea."

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING VEREKER VERDON

MONDAY morning.

The telephone bell.

"Yes; yes; it is Mrs. Underwood. . . . Oh you, Agnes! Yes, of course, come to lunch—won't Jim come too? What? . . . day on the what? Oh, Bench! All right—you come and we'll have a good talk. Yes. One o'clock."

They were sitting over their coffee, good coffee

that Gran made in a little glass machine.
"I can hardly believe," Mrs. Chester said, "that you're actually settled here, only five miles from Pinnell's End. And you like it—you really do?"

"So far, I love it."

"You don't think you'll miss London and the theatres and concerts and pictures and all the clever

people?"

For a moment Gran looked wistful but cheered up as she said, "After all, for weeks together I never went to anything in London, and I can always run up if I want to. At present I don't want to in the least. Life here is full of the most delicious excitements. Listen, Agnes, I've made friends with your problem. So now you must tell me all about her, and the impossible father and everything."

Mrs. Chester, portly, handsome, mother of many

sons, with the poise and wisdom such experience gives to women, looked really surprised: "Made friends with Raby," she exclaimed. "How on earth did you come across her? In the woods?"

"Oh dear, no; I met her at tea."

"In the name of wonder, where?"

"Here, in this house. She came to tea with me."

"But till yesterday in church you'd never seen her. You asked me who she was. How did you get hold of her? Where women are concerned she's as farouche as her father."

"All the same, my dear Agnes, she came to tea with me, and I didn't run after her or invite her. She just came. So now tell me all about them."

"Before I tell you a single thing you've got to explain to me how you got Raby inside this house."

"I can't explain. She came and perched on the window-sill like a friendly robin; and after we'd talked a bit. I couldn't do less than offer her a few crumbs."

"What do you think of her?"

"That she's extremely frank."

"What did she tell you?"

"Among other things, that she thought I must be younger than I look," Gran said rather ruefully.
"That was rather a facer. Most of us hope it's

the other way on."

"She meant it kindly—I know that. I well remember thinking anyone over thirty was incredibly old and so did you."

"You always remember all the absurd things we thought and did. That boy of mine you nursed all through that awful hot weather at Ferozepore always says you're the youngest person he knows."

"Never mind me now. Tell me about the Verdons.

20 RABY

What is there so dreadful about the father, and how do you come to know him?"

"He's a very distant connection of Jim's unfortunately; and knew him at Oxford. He came up in Jim's last year and from the first contrived to make something of a splash—played polo and hunted with the Bicester, got elected to the Bullingdon and ran a rather clever little magazine that infuriated the dons."

"Well, there's nothing very dreadful in all that," Gran said tolerantly.

"He was queer, though, even then; quite fairly good at games, but a bad loser always; sulked and got savage, so that men didn't care to play with him, and in his second year he got sent down, having in the meantime broken every possible rule. Then Jim lost sight of him for some years, till we heard he had married one of the three Miss Dressers, daughters of the cornflour king. She was rather colourless and dull, I believe."

"That, I suppose, was the unfortunate lady who produced the five girl babies who died in infancy."

"Raby told you about that, did she?"

"Yes; and then?"

"Well, we used to come and stay occasionally—he seemed fond of Jim in those days—but he never brought her. I didn't like him even then. I hated the sneering way he used to speak of his wife, and he never brought her to visit us, though we asked her over and over again. As our children grew bigger he used to look at them with a sort of fierce hunger that quite frightened me, though I must own he was always quite nice to them and they adored him—children and dogs have no discrimination as to morals."

"I rather sympathise with him about the little boys," Gran said. "I've felt like that myself sometimes. How long had they been married when she died?"

"About eleven years, I think, and he came into all her money, over eighty thousand pounds; the last poor little baby lived one day after her, and he inherited from the child. I believe her relatives, who disliked him intensely, tried to go to law about it. But her money was tied up on her children if they outlived her, and they couldn't do anything."

"Well, and what happened then?"

"He squandered the poor woman's money in every kind of riotous living. Most of it went in racing. Then, suddenly, after he was forty, he fell desperately in love with a girl he saw sitting in her father's gig outside a cottage. The father was a doctor in Barnard Castle. Lovely she was, and good as gold, and hadn't sixpence in the world."

Mrs. Chester's kind eyes were soft and reminiscent.

"Did you know her, Agnes?"

"I met her once, and in justice to him I must say I think she was awfully happy. Anyway they were utterly in love with each other: and I think then he really was trying to behave himself. She was a big girl, looked the picture of health and was quite simple and conventional. Full of plans she was for peace, retrenchment and reform generally."

"And she died when Raby was born?"

"I can never understand it. . . . They say it was a dreadful shock to her when she was told the baby was a girl. She had been so certain she would give him the son he longed for. Anyhow everything went wrong and she died when Raby was five days old."

"Is Raby called after her mother?"

22

"Raby's called after the village in Durham where he first met her mother."

"Is he fond of Raby?"

Mrs. Chester shook her head. "I don't think he is, not really. He seems to resent it that she has always been perfectly strong and well from the very first, that she's quick and fearless and like her mother and yet couldn't manage to be a boy."

"It's strange how these things are arranged," Gran mused. "Here are you and Jim with six sons and you'd have loved a girl; and here's that poor man..."

"In this particular case," Mrs. Chester interrupted, "I think things were most certainly arranged for the best. When you know a little more about Vereker Verdon you'll see whether he or Jim is the sort of father six boys ought to have."

"He certainly doesn't seem to be the sort of father

one little girl ought to have."

"It's a scandal, a shame. I'd-like to snatch her away from him and never let him see her. How can she grow up nice with that man?—the things he says. The very fact that he's clever and keeps himself in the movement in lots of ways makes him more dangerous."

"Who are Bates and Biddy?"

"Bates is the stud-groom—that ridiculous stud will ruin Vereker, he won't give it up and he can't afford it—Bates is a first-class man, steady and conscientious. They say he only stays so that he can keep an eye on Raby. Biddy's her nurse and the housekeeper and sees to things generally. Her name's Bidwell, really. She's a cross between Cassandra and Mrs. Gummidge, but she's been with Raby all her life, and she's honest and faithful and does her best for the child—though she is dreadfully depressing. Vereker can't

stand her, but as he knows very well no other servant of her type would stand him for a week, he comes across her as little as possible and lets her run the house as she likes, provided she keeps a good cook."

"How old is Raby?"

"Nearly fourteen. I'm glad you reminded me; her poor little birthday's next week, third of May. Her father never remembers it, and a good thing, too; for if he did he'd only be bitter about it and greet her with a recriminating face and railings at fate."

"Has she no aunts or uncles to interfere-no

grandparents?"

"I don't think there are any grandparents. Her father has sisters, I believe, and so had her mother, but Vereker quarrelled with the lot of them years ago and won't hear his only brother's name because he's the next heir and gets Markways when Vereker dies. Besides he has two sons, both at Harrow, and Vereker will never forgive that. He'll get nothing but Markways, poor chap, for Vereker's taken every penny out of it he possibly can. As it is he's living on the rent. He's got a good tenant and it's in far better order than when he had it."

"I can see you dislike him very much," Gran said, "but beyond being a bad father to Raby and a thoroughly embittered man, what does he do that you're so down on him?"

"He certainly drinks, I believe he drugs, though Jim says I've no business to say anything of the kind. He consorts with disreputable people, and is haughty and surly and unbearably rude to anybody who happens to be respectable and doesn't happen to be dever in his particular way. He shamefully neglects his only child, and yet won't send her to school where she'd be well looked after. I tell you, my dear, I'm

rabid on the subject of Vereker Verdon, so it's no use expecting me to be charitable."

"Is he rude to Jim?"

"Oh, Jim! Nobody's rude to Jim—he's got the temper of an angel and they just aren't somehow—but even Jim can't find much to say for him."

"What about the people round about? Do they

like him at all?"

"They were quite ready to be friendly when he came, but he's never at home when anyone calls, and he sent one of the men round with his cards in return—so, naturally, they did nothing more. He doesn't hunt, lost his nerve probably, but he let Raby go out last season two days a week with young Bates to look after her and sent a pretty liberal subscription, but he simply won't know people."

"Are they kind to Raby?"

"How can they be? Would you have let a little girl brought up like that play with Cicely? I know I shouldn't. My boys are grown up—but if I had little girls . . . You were particular enough about Cicely, I remember."

Gran sighed: "Of course I was careful, but Cicely never was difficult, never unexpected—now a child

like Raby . . ."

"I believe you'd have loved a child like Raby, you unreasonable woman. You may thank your lucky stars for Cicely, always good, always docile, no newfangled, upsetting notions." Mrs. Chester flashed a quizzical glance at Gran, who was staring with concentrated intensity into her empty coffee cup. "You never knew what it was to be anxious like some of us."

"Cicely is very like her father," Gran said thoughtfully, "very like."

"Be thankful she is, my dear, and that she's so safely married and happy. You won't lack the unexpected in the holidays, I fancy. Johnny doesn't strike me as either placid or biddable. And if you take on Raby in term time you'll find your work cut out for you. Now you must take me round the garden and then I must go."

"Just tell me this," Gran pleaded. "Who were

those two girls in church with Raby?"

"I know nothing about them except that they're not the sort of girls Raby should go about with. Heaven knows how she picked them up. I don't say there's any harm in them—but they're thoroughly common—anyone can see that. I only hope they'll keep clear of Vereker."

"Poor lonely child," Gran sighed. "You're cer-

tainly right as to the problem."

CHAPTER IV

RETROSPECTION

MRS. CHESTER had duly admired the garden and the stream and Gran saw her off at the front gate. She watched her portly progress along the narrow pavement till, reaching the bend, she turned and waved like a school-girl.

Gran went back into the house to fetch a green jersey she was knitting for Tim, and went and sat under the umbrella tree.

Tim's jersey did not get on very fast, however; for presently the patch of green knitting lay on her lap with idle hands dropped upon it, while the warm April sunshine fell on them lightly, like a caress. A gentle ripple stirred the surface of the stream and from where she sat she could see the big rings spreading where a trout had risen, and Bannister's stooping back as he bent to do something to the herbaceous border. The umbrella tree rustled softly and a willow-wren flew in and out of a massed honeysuckle that threatened to break down a rather shaky wooden arch.

Yes: it was a pleasant haven to have drifted into after long sailing in seas that were sometimes troublous and seldom altogether smooth. Only an hour's journey from Cicely too, and such a delightful place for the babies to visit. She smiled as she

thought of them and started knitting Tim's jersey again.

But it was an idle afternoon; a seductive, selfindulgent afternoon; and very soon her hands had dropped into her lap again, and she was absorbedly watching two young thrushes, immensely bustling and important, who pervaded a pear-tree in full bloom, that stood straight and white and wonderful against the sky.

It was quite true what Agnes had said: she ought to be thankful Cicely had always been so like her father, so correct always. Agnes had not used that word, but it expressed them both—Cicely and her father. She paused upon the word rather guiltily. Perhaps it was not kind to think thus of her husband—yet it certainly had been his chief characteristic.

A hard-working, conscientious official: quite uninspired: blind and deaf to the humour and pathos and individuality of the people he helped to rule, he marched steadily and at an even pace along the beaten track. He was suspicious of everything new merely because it was new. He never acted hastily, because he mistrusted impulse; and for a similar reason never rose to an emergency with the swift decision that can so often save a dubious situation.

The Government of India never had cause to find fault with his administration, but the Government of India persistently passed him by in the matter of promotion.

Gran had been a good wife to him and he had been a kind and affectionate husband to her with certain reservations. He mistrusted her enthusiasm, he deprecated her readiness to consider what was new in art, literature or life. He grudged her her many friendships, and he grumbled without ceasing at the

ups and downs such as inevitably accompanied change of stations in India, leaves at home, and the necessary separation from either wife or daughter or sometimes both.

As she sat thinking of him, a phrase of Tim's last time she had been with him came into her mind. There had been ructions in the nursery, tears and recriminations; and, after Nancy had sobbingly recounted the full tale of Tim's iniquities, Tim hiccoughed bitterly that "Nancy . . . was . . . awfully full of blaming."

Throughout her life with him Cecil Underwood had been "awfully full of blaming" and Gran had come in for a good deal of the blame.

Poor Cecil! He was a martyr to indigestion, and those who lived with him shared his martyrdom more often than he realised.

Gran tried really hard to feel lonely and sad without him as she sat in Little Leadon garden, thinking of her husband; but, in her heart of hearts, she knew that the last ten middle-aged, widowed years were far fuller and more ardently lived than those she had spent with him as his wife. And this, in spite of a very modest income which she shared with Cicely since Cicely married, and added, so Gran considered, to the world's joy by giving to it Nancy and Tim.

Gran smiled as she remembered the time when, realising with a thrill the innumerable new activities that were opening up for women, she had been ready to make tremendous sacrifices that Cicely might fit herself for any career that appealed to her. But no sort of career appealed to Cicely, save that of the nice girl who longed to leave school as early as possible, join her parents in India, and have a good time.

She never did have that good time in India to

which she had so eagerly looked forward, for her father died during her last term at school. And Gran came home alone, burdened with many packing cases and but small experience of English housekeeping, to try on straightened means to give the adored young daughter such good times as were then possible.

Cicely decided that as India was denied to her foreign travel was the only balm that could soothe her bereaved spirit. So for a year they "travelled," staying in second-rate hotels and pensions. Then, home to a "round of visits" among relations; finally settling, by Cicely's wish, in a little house at

Hamchester, where she had been at school.

There they found friends among the many similarly-circumstanced Anglo-Indians who settle in that pretty town; and when she was twenty Cicely married the Reverend Frank Shaw, handsome young vicar of its largest and most fashionable church.

For the fourth time Gran started her life afresh and took a little flat in London. She had a feeling that it was clever and amusing to live in London, and that she needed a great many things to close the huge cleavage that the loss of Cicely's society had made in her life. She had, during the years with Cecil Underwood, learned to face facts; to observe; and to make deductions. And she knew that when a child, either son or daughter, marries, though the child is dear and absorbing as ever to the parent, the parent is by no means so dear or absorbing to the child. The child would probably and vehemently disclaim any such change of heart, but it is there nevertheless, natural and inevitable as is all change and growth. With her pension she had six hundred a year. She gave Cicely a hundred for pin-money (for of course Cicely lost her pension on her marriage), and she felt very affluent and independent.

In the flat, in Pembridge Mansions, there was a neat little spare bedroom always at the disposal of brothers, nephews, Anglo-Indian friends and of Cicely and her husband should they happen to be in Town. She was by no means lonely and took life with her usual zest.

Then Nancy, and a year later Tim, appeared, and Cicely and Frank made it plain to Gran that children are expensive luxuries; that it was selfish for her to live alone in a costly flat, with a servant for her exclusive use, when she could live on so much less, and help them so much more, were she more modestly

housed in rooms or in a boarding-house.

"You see," Cicely pointed out, "it isn't like a little house in the country, where the children could come and stay with you when Frank and I want to go away. He must get right away sometimes with no family cares—and we shouldn't like them to be in London. Now if you were in rooms or one of those nice residential hotels with separate tables, you could always give up your room and come and stay with the children while we are away, and be saving all the time. And I should feel so happy, Mother darling, if they were left in your charge. It would make all the difference to both of us."

Gran's brothers were annoyed when she gave up the flat, and "said things" about Cicely and Frank.

John Gray was quite rude about it.

"Of course the uncles are cross," Cicely said. "They're always making use of you, Mother dear, and it must be very expensive."

"No, Cicely, never that; they are most generous always—and look how they take me to the play and

to all sorts of interesting things. I love having them."

"Yes, Mummy dear, I dare say; but I know Nancy and Tim are more to you than theatres—Frank and I are both very fond of the theatre, but look how seldom we go!"

"It's not a very expensive little flat," Gran

pleaded, "and I do love to have my friends."

"It will always be an expensive flat for you because you're such a hospitable darling: everybody takes advantage of you—you know they do: and it's such a chance that you can give it up at the end of three years, this next March, if you like—or would you like to let it, furnished? If you decide to store the furniture we can take some of it, for, you know, we must furnish that empty room now for the night-nursery, and the rest of it wouldn't cost much to store."

It didn't.

Gran gave up the flat and now, she reflected, all had turned out for the very best. Here she was living in a charming house rent free, and even Cicely agreed that it would always be a pleasant change for the babies. "Only you must wire off the stream, remember, before they come—as high as Tim's head, for he climbs everywhere. Oh, darling Mother, it is nice to think you are so near."

Dear Cicely, so affectionate always!

Yes: it was certainly nicer to be at Little Leadon than at Hamchester. She had tried that for a bit in rooms recommended by Frank and Cicely, and she was very careful never to intrude upon the young people unless she was asked. They did ask her to lunch occasionally, and even to dinner when there was nobody else, and they both of them came duti-

32 RABY

fully to see her at least once a week. But somehow Hamchester had lost its savour for Gran, and to be so near Cicely and yet not able to see her when she wanted her, which was pretty well every hour of the day, was too trying. So she went back to the "nice boarding-house with separate tables" and was more lonely than she had been in Hamchester.

People were kind though: as it all came back to her, Gran remembered that thankfully. Her old friends did not quite forget her, even though she no longer had a bedroom to offer them. Her brothers still came to London sometimes, and took her out to dine and to do a play; and old friends from the East sought her out from time to time and gave her the news she hungered for. And for six weeks each summer she "fitted in" with Cicely and Frank and took charge of Nancy and Tim while their parents (and very often their nurse too, for part of the time) sought refreshment in change of scene and people.

Yes: it was pleasant not to have to look for a new abode every six months or so: to have beautiful things to look at; grass and flowers and gracious old houses; to have her meals served on a polished table in which she could see her own pleased face; and best of all to have a spotless bathroom, with really hot water and no remains of other people's washings. There were the Chesters, those old friends, within such easy reach; and all sorts of friendly people calling; and there was that child...

"Perhaps," Gran reflected humbly, "she may make friends with me, for I'm rather lonely too."

CHAPTER V

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

"Is tea ready, Biddy? I'm so hungry." Raby burst into the room like a cyclone. The curtains blew in, the pictures swung on their cords, the door banged, and the tea-things rattled.

Biddy dropped her sewing, put both hands to her head, and in a hushed voice that tacitly rebuked all this commotion said, "Tea's been laid ready this half-hour, Miss Raby, and the kettle's boiled over twice waiting for me to make it."

"Well, make it now, old dear, I'm simply ravenous."

"Wherever have you been," the hushed voice continued. "Look at your hands! You can't sit down like that, and for goodness' sake don't bang the door."

"I can't help the stramash, Biddy; it's the wind. I'll fly and wash. I'm glad there's scones and strawberry jam; I could eat like an elephant, I'm so hungry."

"Well, if you are, Miss, you'll have to curb your appetite. Jenkins has just sent up Waters with word from your pa you're to have dinner downstairs with him tonight, and you won't . . ."

"What d'you say, Biddy, Father what? Do speak up!"

"Your pa's sent word you're to have dinner with

him tonight," Biddy reiterated patiently, without

raising her voice by the fraction of a tone.

"Says I'm to dine with him tonight," Raby repeated incredulously, standing perfectly still as though struck into immobility by such astounding news. "Whatever for?"

"Well, I suppose," Biddy was busy with the kettle and had her back to Raby, "he thinks you're getting of a sensible age and would be nice company, and it's only right and proper you should dine downstairs now and again."

"Well!" Raby exclaimed. "It's too extraordinary, but dinner or no dinner, I must have some tea now.

I'll be back in a jiff."

The door banged again. Again the curtains swayed into the room and pictures leapt out from the walls, and Biddy, as she poured boiling water into the tea-pot, shook her head and murmured, "There's more in this than meets the eye."

She was a thin, stooping woman well over fifty, with a face like an amiable sheep. She always moved with elaborate, calculated quiet. A great deal that she said was inaudible, for she rarely raised her voice above the muffled tones people use in a house of mourning when someone is lying dead in the next room. Even a message delivered by Biddy took on something of the solemnity of a requiem. She liked quiet: and quiet sometimes may be as infectious as noise if steady persistence accompanies it. When Raby came back she held the door with both hands so that it shouldn't bang and stood at the table waiting for Biddy's whispered grace. Long ago Biddy had given up asking Raby to say grace, for she never knew what strange invocation might follow.

Raby started on the scones and drank her first cup

of tea at a draught.

"Have you seen Father today?" she asked.

"No, Miss Raby, I have not. I very seldom do come across your pa, being so-to-speak mostly in another part of the 'ouse."

"Did Waters say what sort of a mood he's in?" "Certainly not, Miss Raby—as if I should allow

Waters to take such a liberty!"

"But it's so funny," Raby persisted. "He saw me at lunch. He was just as grumpy as usual then. He never breathed a word about wanting me to have dinner. Is anybody coming?"

"Not that I know of. If anyone was coming Miss, he wouldn't have you down, being so-to-speak still in the schoolroom and too young to dine with

company, though not with your pa alone."
"Well, it's most mysterious," and Raby dropped back into her chair, as though the problem was altogether beyond her. "I can't think what has possessed him."

"Probably," Biddy suggested in her most funereal voice, "he thinks it's time he saw rather more of his daughter if she's to be any sort of comfort to him in his old age."

"But I don't want to see more of him," Raby exclaimed aghast, "and the last thing I want to be

is a comfort to anyone's old age."

"Whether you want it or not, Miss Raby, it's your duty to be a comfort to your papa, and him a widower and all. And I'm sure I hope you'll try to be it. It's more than time you settled down like a nice young lady and not go racing about rattin' with ferrets and such vermin, which I'm perfectly aware you've been doing this afternoon from the smell you brought into the room with you."

"What a nose you've got, Biddy!" Raby said admiringly. "It may be a funny shape, but it can smell anything a mile off."

"My nose, Miss Raby," Biddy answered huffily, "may be a funny shape, but it's just as it came from

the hands of my Maker."

"Now, Biddy, you know that's nonsense. He doesn't give himself a chance to model people's noses—you don't get me to believe that. How could he with such quantities of people in the world?"

"The capabilities of Providence are not to be

measured by mortals like you and me."

"Is Providence and God the same thing, Biddy? Sometimes you say one and sometimes the other. Now are they two people or one? Or is it Providence makes all the noses?"

"No good comes of asking or answering questions like that, Miss. What I want to know is what you've been doing all this afternoon."

"But you said you knew."

"No, Miss, I didn't say I knew, but I made a good guess from the atmosphere you brought into the room, and I wish you wouldn't."

"Is it still there, the atmosphere?" Raby asked rather anxiously, "for if it is I'd better have a bath before I go near Father. He's such a fidget about

smells and things."

"That's the most sensible thing I've heard you say today," Biddy agreed, "but you can't have it directly, not for a good hour—you must digest your tea first. Then when you've had your bath, I'll dress you and see that you go downstairs like a real little lady."

"D'you think he'll notice?" Raby asked.

"I expect, Miss Raby, your pa notices a great deal more than you think for."

"Oh, he notices things like smudges or noles or tears, or if you sniff or breathe too loud or kick the leg of your chair, or knock your fork against your teeth—but I mean if I looked nice d'you think he'd notice?"

"Give him the chance and see," Biddy answered more brightly than usual, but added, "I misdoubt gentlemen's much more likely to notice pretty looks than pretty behaviour any time."

The Hall at Leadon was square, comfortably furnished with good things of middle-Georgian period; floored with yellow stone, uncovered save for a rug or two and a bearskin before the open hearth, where Vereker Verdon was standing with his back to the wood fire.

A small-made man of less than medium height, he had, in his youth, contrived to look taller than he was because he was thin to emaciation and his body well proportioned. Now when middle-age, lack of exercise—and other things—had blunted and thickened his figure, he looked short. Especially did this increase seem artificial and out of place in his face: the long-nosed, long-chinned, narrow-headed type of face that when it is thin is described as ascetic, but when fleshy is apt to look gross, especially when accompanied, as in his case, by a dead pallor. His eyes were heavy-lidded, well-shaped, of a light hazel, and tilted like a fawn's: set rather near together, perhaps, but then nature had intended his to be a narrow face and its present width and fleshiness seemed redundant as a frilly cushion set on a seventeenth-century oak chair.

The staircase faced the fireplace and was of uncarpeted oak. Raby, in a white frock with an orange sash, and a wide orange ribbon twing back her thick

bright hair, was descending the stairs, walking delicately, for they were polished and slippery. She wore white silk stockings and white Cromwell shoes with buckles, and Biddy had brushed her hair till it shone more like a newly unsheathed chestnut than ever.

"You needn't make that infernal row, Jenkins, Miss Raby is here," Verdon said as Jenkins advanced to beat the Indian gong. "D'you know, Raby, you're growing rather a high-looker. Come, and let me see

if you've any wits to match your looks."

He offered Raby his arm which she took nervously. "I hope you're not going to be too big, though," he went on as they walked into the dining-room. "There's a slump in big women just now."

"What's a slump?" Raby asked as they sat down.
"Too many of the same sort of thing, so that their quantity spoils the market, and they have to be sold cheap to get rid of 'em."

"Have you got the right to sell me?" Raby

asked.

"My experience of your sex leads me to believe that as a rule they're ready to sell themselves without any help from outsiders."

"I don't see much fun in that," Raby said slowly. "It would be much more interesting to keep oneself

for oneself and see what one turned out."

"If you contrive to do that you're a philosopher.

You like oysters, eh?"

"I've only had them once before," Raby said, "at Mrs. Chester's . . . and I think I like them. Yes . . . I've decided—I do like them."

"That's one up to you then. People who like oysters and olives are always less priggish than people who don't. But now let us return to the subject of belonging to yourself. . . . Eat your oysters slowly,

mind; they're not porridge, and they're the last you'll get for some time. . . . Most women, especially the young ones, ardently desire to belong to somebody else. How old are you, by the way?"

"Nearly fourteen."

"God!—is it as long as that?"

Vereker leaned his elbow on the table and his chin on his hand, staring at his daughter. "You're like her, you know. You're like your mother—outwardly. I don't see much resemblance otherwise."

"I suppose," Raby said, "she wanted to belong to you?"

"She did, and she didn't. She was a generous giver but she never lost or merged her identity and she was extraordinarily cock-sure about some things."

"What sort of things?"

ľ

"Things like right and wrong and what she wanted. She'd a very clear notion as to what she wanted. She'd have got it too, I fancy, if she'd lived. . . . No—no soup, Jenkins. Do you want soup, Raby? Right; we'll miss soup."

It was a short dinner, few courses, light and wellcooked. Vereker ate very little and drank nothing till Jenkins put the port in front of him at dessert.

"I shan't offer you any port, Raby," he said, as he helped himself, "because you've got a good complexion."

"Do you not mind about yours, Father?"

"Mine, I think, has reached a stage when it can take care of itself. So we'll let it go at that, and return to the remark you made at the beginning of dinner about belonging to yourself. You can't manage it, mind you, unless you decide quite definitely what you want from life, and how you're going to set about getting it. The majority of

people don't know what they want. Vagueness and loose thinking are the curse of the age."

"Are you a very tight thinker, Father?" Raby asked.

"I'm not sure. No, I suppose I'm not. 'Clear's' the word you want. All the same, quite early in life I realised that the world may be roughly divided into the gives and the gets, and I determined to be a get."

"But suppose one chose to be a give."

"That's your own look-out. I might think you rather a fool, but if you've thought about it and decided, then it's your funeral. The people I object to are the hypocrites who pretend to be gives, while all the time they're grinding their own axes for all they're worth. You can't have it both ways."

"I don't see," Raby objected, "how you can be thinking all the time of what you want and how to get it. Things happen and you haven't time. You're a get one minute and a give the next. Everybody's bath it come to me.

both it seems to me. Nobody's only one."

Vereker looked hard at his daughter. "Perhaps you're right," he allowed. "There's something of both in all of us; but I think you'll find the gets are considerably more numerous than the gives, and it's always well to shout with the largest crowd. The sensible person, before he puts himself out for anyone else, considers, 'Now how is this going to benefit me? Is it worth while?"

"But that would be a fearful nuisance," Raby objected. "I could never bother about that sort of thing. Either I like people or I don't and there's an end of it."

"That's where you make a mistake," her father answered, his keen eyes fixed on her face. "That's

not an end of anything but the beginning of endless complications, as you'll find to your cost later on. You'll never be mistress of your fate or captain of your soul if you drift wherever the winds of impulse blow you. I don't think you're altogether a fool, but you're vague. I'm certain you haven't an idea what you really want—now have you?"

Raby looked at her father, looked long and earnestly as though she were deciding something in her own mind. He tried to stare her down, but she met his derisive gaze squarely and neither looked

away nor lowered her eyes.

"Well," he asked irritably, "do you know what

you want?"

"Yes," she said suddenly, "I want one of Sally's puppies to give away—a dog—there are two bitches, but I want a dog, the one with the very black eye. Can I tell Bates you said I could have it?"

Vereker laughed: "I misjudged you, Raby, you're not so indefinite as I feared. You may have the dog puppy with the very black eye and do with him as you please."

"Thank you, Father, and would you like me to go now? You've pretty well finished the port."

"Never comment on a man's drinks, Raby, it's not good manners—but you may go. We'll dine together again quite soon. Ah! don't push your chair back like that . . ."

CHAPTER VI

REFLECTIONS

VERY slowly Raby mounted the stairs, pondering as she went. Instead of making straight for the schoolroom where Biddy would be waiting for her, she tip-toed past the door and went to her bedroom. It was not dark, for the blinds were not drawn and the moon shone in. It was a worry to Biddy that Raby never would allow her to draw down blinds or pull curtains across her windows. Even when she was quite little if they were closed when she went to bed. the moment Biddy left her she climbed out of her cot and pulled them back. She had always lived in the country, with no other houses near, and the idea of being overlooked never occurred to her. crossed the room to the open latticed window, pushed it further open and leaned out into the scented night. In the herbaceous border, under her window, were tall flowering currant-bushes, and the sharp sweet perfume floated up to her like the caress of a homely hand.

Sayings of, apparently, slight import will sometimes have far-reaching influence on a young receptive mind. Assertions made carelessly, light as weed-scattered seed, fall into some safe cranny of the listening soul, and germinate. And Raby, who had, so far, taken life much as a healthy young animal takes it, with full joy in its movement and colour; in her case, tinged with a certain fatalism unconsciously instilled by Bates, whose simple philosophy was subtly compounded of courage and compassion.

This evening she felt as though she were fumbling in the dark for something she could not find. She wanted something and she had no idea what it was. It was an uncomfortable feeling, that gave her a lump in her throat, and her eyes smarted—and . . . she hated to feel like that.

Just lately it had, as she put it, "come over her" once before. Last Sunday evening after she got back from tea with that woman with the grey hair and the young eyes. She remembered so distinctly the feel of her hand as they went upstairs together. And again when she had washed hers the light touch and the kind voice saying, "No; they're not nearly dry, let me." And how, for the moment, she forgot what a great girl she was and surrendered her hands to be dried for her, quite happily, though afterwards when she thought it over she felt rather silly, for it was then that queer horrid sensation in her throat bothered her.

She wished her father liked her a bit better. He had been kind tonight. It was jolly decent of him to give her Sara's best puppy, and never to ask for whom she wanted it. She wished she knew exactly what he meant about the gives and the gets. If he, as he seemed to make out, was a get, he didn't seem to have done particularly well out of it. Anyone could see he wasn't very happy. After all, it would be rather nice to have a mother even if she was a bit interfering. Perhaps she'd explain things, difficult things, like having to decide what you want in the world, and doing your best to get it.

Hitherto when Raby had required things explained

44 RABY

she had generally gone to Bates, and he seldom failed her. Where the breeding of animals is part of the daily work it is impossible for long to conceal the facts of birth and death from an active, inquisitive, intelligent child with far more freedom than is accorded to most children. Bates had made no such attempt. Simple and sensible and clean himself, he satisfied her curiosity with the truth, and contrived at the same time to imbue her with something of his own rather strict views as to what Stevenson calls "the ultimate decency"; with the result that she spoke of such things to nobody else.

"'Tis the Lord's doin's, Miss Raby," he said one day, "'tisn't mine; I don't say as if I'd been consulted I wouldn't 'ave warned 'Im. But then I warn't, you

вее."

"I suppose," Raby answered thoughtfully, "after he'd made all the animals, an' Adam an' Eve an' Pinch-me-tight, he got tired and felt he simply couldn't go an' make them all over again when this little lot died, an' so he just said they'd got to do it themselves and that's why it's all so messy."

Bates scratched his chin. "I never thought o' that," he exclaimed admiringly. "You've got a head on your shoulders, Miss, and no mistake. Us'll just

leave it at that."

So they left it at that.

Thus it came about that while in some matters she was much better informed than most little girls of her age, in other respects she was still extremely young and ignorant. Tonight she did not feel her usual assurance that Bates would be able to illuminate these dark places with the steadily burning lamp of his common-sense. She wasn't even sure that she could formulate her difficulties sufficiently to lay them before him, and Biddy was of no earthly use.

Poor Biddy, she'd be wondering why she didn't come up.

Raby drew her head in from the window. Her room was at one end of a long passage which widened out at the other into a landing that formed a sort of gallery whence you could look down into the hall. Biddy was leaning over the oak stair-rail evidently listening.

"It's all right, Biddy," Raby said quietly. "He

hasn't eaten me."

Biddy jumped: "Why, Miss Raby, I never heard you come up. Did you come the back way? You know I never like you to do that."

"No, Biddy, but I went straight into my room for

a minute, just to look at the moon."

"Moon, indeed!" Biddy said crossly, "an' me waiting here so anxious to know how you'd got on and all. Was your pa pleased with you?"

"I suppose so, for he didn't slate me. He was quite pleasant. Oh, yes; he did say something, that I'm growing into a high-looker but mustn't be too big. How'm I to prevent that?"

"What else did you talk about?" Biddy asked

curiously as she was brushing Raby's hair.

"Oh, I dun' know," Raby muttered. "Surely that'll do. You brushed me for ten minutes before I went down and what's the good of doing it all over again now?"

"'Air like yours is that strong and thick it can't be brushed too much if it's to have any gloss on it.

Now your teeth."

"Oh, dear," Raby sighed, "and to think I've got to do all these things every night as long as I live and I may live to be a hundred. It must be so lovely just to give yourself a shake and curl up all ready for bed

with your dear little puppies all cuddled up round you like Sara."

"It's them sort of things makes the difference between us and the brute-beasts, Miss . . . now your prayers."

Raby plumped down on her knees and bent her head on her clasped hands. A quaint figure in straight white nightdress with two thick pig-tails sticking out on either side of her head.

Her orisons were brief.

"Now my Wuffles"; she mimicked Biddy's voice.

"You're gettin' altogether too big for that sort of ridicklus toy, Miss Raby," Biddy grumbled, but all the same handed Raby an ancient woolly dog that had seen much service. "You couldn't have it if you was at boarding school as you ought to be—the other girls'd laugh at you."

"Then they could laugh. I wouldn't go to bed without Wuffles, if I was at as many schools as I'd had governesses, so there! Wherever I am I shall always have Wuffles—even when I'm married"; and clasping Wuffles Raby took a flying leap into bed, and snuggled down.

Biddy tucked her in and kissed her.

"You smell of cheese," Raby remarked, "and when I've got Wuffles I feel exactly like Sara with the last puppy they leave her, so I want to sit up and beg."

"You lay still, Miss," and Biddy carried away the lamp. At the door she paused. "Good night, Miss," she said in her usual whisper, "and may the Lord bless you and keep you."

It was Biddy's invariable formula, and as invari-

It was Biddy's invariable formula, and as invariably Raby responded, "Same to you, Biddy."

Then she turned on her side with Wuffles in close

Then she turned on her side with Wuffles in close embrace.

No sooner had Biddy's light footsteps died away down the passage than Raby got up again, this time very quietly.

Still clasping Wuffles she knelt down in the bright-

est patch of moonlight.

3

: :

•

"Hold on a minute, please, God," she whispered, "I haven't quite finished. I've decided, please, I want to be a mixture. Give and get. A bit of both and no selling. And I hope that's clear thinking but I'm not sure."

She got into bed again, her arms outside the bed-

clothes and Wuffles held close against her face.

Still that queer ache in her throat persisted. Still that need she could not define. "I wish I knew what's the matter with me," she whispered to Wuffles, "then I could make for it straight like he said. I'm sure he's right there. I wonder if that woman across the stream knows. I think I'll ask her"

A familiar, comforting smell of wool, and glue, and worn black paint from a sadly scratched nose, emanated from Wuffles. A shy little wind rustled the curtains and touched her face with a fairy kiss. "I will ask that woman." And on this decision Raby slept.

Vereker Verdon sat before his writing-table in the gun-room, but he was not writing. For once he was thinking of the daughter who had just dined with him.

As a rule he accepted her existence much as he did that of the servants. She was part of the household—and it was all horribly expensive. Bills came in for her clothes, and there was the constantly exacerbating bother about governesses. But lately he had ceased to worry about governesses. It was much 48 RABY

more peaceful without them. He hardly ever saw Raby for more than a few minutes at a time, and they were always lying in wait for him and reminding him of her and of themselves.

Occasionally, it is true, Bates would insist on having his opinion as to whether it was safe to let Raby ride such and such a horse—as if Bates didn't know better than he did! Occasionally Biddy, that lugubrious old virgin, would invade his privacy with whispered questions as to whether she could take Miss Raby to be measured for this, that, or the other; and more rarely Jim Chester would come and ask questions; and without putting it into words contrive to let Vereker know what he thought of him about Raby.

That had happened in the afternoon.

Jim Chester had called. He never denied himself to Jim Chester. He'd always liked the chap: there was something so kindly and genuine about him and he never gave advice.

But he did ask questions, and he would talk about Raby.

He rubbed it in, too, that she was growing big. He, Vereker, could see that for himself. She'd grown big. She was five-foot-six if she was an inch, and it was all in the legs too, so she wouldn't stop yet.

Yes: there was that damned governess question or school. Would it be less trouble to send her to school?

There were the bills, bills three times a year. And he'd have to read their putrid rules and fill in forms and sign health certificates and things. And directly she did go to school she'd get distemper or mange or glanders or whatever beastly disease happened to be going about; and then they'd write to him and expect him to be interested.

Confound Jim Chester!

Yet he was right. Something must be done. "Why not," he had asked, "get a thoroughly good governess who'd take entire charge? You'll get her if you offer £100 to £150 a year."

Quite probable, but Vereker couldn't afford that just at present. Governesses never would wait for

their money.

"Well, school then—though that would cost more."

He shut Jim Chester's mouth after that. He was just about fed up with him. Raby's not going to school just yet.

After all, what was the good of all this fuss about education? He supposed she could read and write, in fact, he'd seen her reading.

"A nice woman's influence." Jim started to

harp on that next.

What was it Jim had said? "Agnes would look for a governess."

No thank you! Agnes was one of those people who gave him the sensation of a window suddenly thrown up and cold air rushing in that blew everything about all over the place. Jim was bad enough, but Agnes was intolerable. She did give advice. She criticised and didn't mince her words. A self-sufficient, interfering woman who thought she knew everything just because she'd had six sons. And she hated him. No; Agnes should thrust no meddling fingers into his affairs.

Not a bad kid, Raby. Answered when she was spoken to, hadn't such a disagreeable accent either, though her vowels were a bit broad. If only she could jump the next four years or so they might be quite good pals.

Neither the young of animals nor the young of the

50 RABY

human species had any appeal for Vereker. He disliked crudity. The foals and puppies, kittens and lambs and chickens that filled Raby with such rapture—that have for most people an indescribable charm because they are so gay and funny and pathetic—left him cold; and, if brought into direct contact with any of them, irritated.

Lately things tired him so.

Effort of any sort became more and more distasteful. He liked Leadon Hall because no one disturbed him—as a rule.

When he wanted to dream he could dream. When he wanted to sleep, he could sleep . . . at a price.

What did that confounded fellow mean by asking him if he had made his will, and was Raby properly provided for?

Why Raby was only . . . what did she say she was?

All very well for Jim Chester with his brown face and broad shoulders to talk about wills and schools and such accurséd worries just as though they were a part of a man's daily life like shaving, to be taken as a matter of course. He had no imagination; he couldn't realise what an effort it all meant.

"A nice woman's influence." Jim kept harping on that. All very well for him. His boys all went off to school about eight: he hadn't to be plagued with nice women scattering influence till it made you sneeze.

Happy thought! Let Raby's aunts get her a governess. Give 'em something to do—please 'em, poor souls! Their choice wouldn't be up to much in the way of learning, but she'd be certain to be prim and dull and respectable and would worry the poor child

to death. He'd go away and leave her to it. If he was away when she came, and she was gone before he came back, even the Chesters couldn't say it was his fault.

She wouldn't find it all plain sailing with Raby.

Vereker smiled grimly, remembering certain episodes in the past.

He hadn't seen his wife's sisters for years, but he hadn't actually quarrelled with them as he had with his own, and he knew that Biddy made Raby answer their Christmas letters.

He got up and rang the bell.

How exhausting it all was.

After what seemed to Vereker an intolerably long time, a much-flustered Biddy produced a sheet of paper with an address in Blackheath.

Vereker took a pen and wrote.

CHAPTER VII

ENTER AUSTIN

NEXT day after lunch Raby decided to go and see Gran again. Last time was Sunday. Now it was Thursday, so perhaps it was not too soon. She had her own funny little code of social observance, and her father's execration of any would-be friendly neighbour as a bore, made her timid in her own advances.

She adored Jim and Agnes Chester. She thought them the most delightful and the kindest people in the world. The few times she had actually stayed in their house were happy beyond anything she had ever known. Yet it never occurred to her that she might ride over and see them unless she received a definite invitation to do so.

Her original visit to Gran was partly the result of impulsive curiosity and partly a rather guilty feeling as regarded her own rudeness in church. Had she realised that the woman who turned and looked reprovingly at her was a friend of her beloved Mrs. Chester she would not have made a face. Having made a face she keenly desired to know what effect it had on the derided one. It's no fun to shock people if you are ignorant of what form their shockedness takes. Raby was afraid of nobody except her father, and of him only lately, because there was something about him at times that she could not understand. She was conscious, too, that the

servants were afraid for her, and it made her nervous during his outbursts of temper.

She was sure this queerness was the reason why Biddy was anxiously hanging over the stair-rail last night. That although Biddy was pleased she should be sent for to dine with her father, when she seemed to have been gone rather a long time Biddy was worried. Raby had no doubt that during the last half hour of her stay downstairs Biddy had vibrated between the schoolroom and the staircase all the time.

When she told Biddy that she was going to Little Leadon, Biddy approved but instantly insisted on a clean white silk blouse, a new grey coat and skirt, and a velour hat to match.

"It isn't Sunday or a party," Raby protested, but all the same she rather liked her own appearance when Biddy had done with her.

"It's just fifteen years today since father died," Biddy remarked lugubriously, as she handed Raby a pair of gloves. "He'd have been ninety-four if he'd 'a lived."

Raby made a rapid calculation. "He was pretty old anyhow when he died," she remarked unfeelingly.

"That's nothing to do with it, Miss. The older folks is the more you miss them, because you've had them so long."

"Were you very fond of your father?" she asked,

more sympathetically.

بأ

. 5 % [...

"Well, Miss, I didn't see so very much of him after I once went into service—and I went when I was thirteen. But I was always a good daughter."

"Was he always a good father?"

"He was a most respectable man, Miss Raby." Raby fled.

Biddy had a quite phenomenal memory for deaths and disasters and the birthdays of the departed. All her life Raby seemed to have started each day as a depressing anniversary of some sort, and such constant celebration of melancholy events tended to make her callous.

The quickest way to Little Leadon was through the stable-yard and into the lane leading to the stream. In the yard she met Bates, a small, rather bow-legged, spare old man with keen, long-sighted blue eyes, deeply scored round about with many wrinkles. He had a bald head with wisps of reddish hair assiduously brushed over it, and the brick-red complexion of a fair man who all his life has been exposed to English weather.

"You do look smart, Miss," he exclaimed admir-

ingly, "and where may you be off to?"

"I'm going to pay a call," Raby announced importantly, "on the new lady that's come to Little Leadon."

"Well now, I'm jolly glad to hear it, Miss Raby. It's time you went about a bit more and let the county see what a fine young lady you be growed, on foot as well as on horseback."

"A high-looker, eh Bates? That's what father

said about me last night."

"Did he now?" Bates said thoughtfully. "I'm a bit anxious about master—I don't think as he's well." "Why? Because he called me a high-looker?"

"No, Miss—not at all—that was only nat'ral and true's gospel. What I mean is . . ." Here Bates paused and looked hard at Raby. "I sometimes think as he's more ill than any on us knows. He 'aven't been round the stables for a fortnight—an' I

ask you what be the good of keepin' up all this 'ere if he don't take no sart of delight in it? It downight worries me. I wish as you would persuade him to see a doctor."

"Me get him to see a doctor!—as if I could do anything of that sort! Why, he'd blow me to blazes."

"Well," Bates said slowly, "it be a puzzlement, all on it. Someone ought to do something and there don't seem no one to do nothing."

"I expect he'll soon be all right again," Raby said cheerfully. "He was awfully nice last night. I

had dinner with him, you know."

"So you told me this morning, Miss Raby, when you come about Sara's puppy, which can't be took away from her yet not for another fortnight. You run along now, else p'raps the lady'll be gone out callin' 'erself."

Bates watched the tall jaunty figure cross the yard and vanish through one of the big wooden gates. Young Bates came out from a loose-box and joined him. "Picks up her feet like a thorough-bred, don't she?" young Bates said admiringly.

Old Bates sighed heavily: "I wish I knowed

what's going to happen to she."

"Strikes me it won't be long before something 'appens to all of us," his son answered gloomily. "If it warn't for you an' mother I wouldn't stop another month—an' what you've stopped on so long for passes me."

"It passes me as well," Bates replied meekly. "But there, I be a holdish man to change an' though money's bin tight lats o' times an' we've all on us 'ad to wait, we always got 'un in the hend. It 'ave never bin like it is now. We owes for carn; we owes

for 'ay; we owes all round the shop, and dealers and tradesmen alike's beginning to be a bit nasty. An' whenever I goes with the bills to the Master, 'e says, 'Not now, Bates-I can't attend to you just now.' An' if I perseveres like, he ups and curses me something awful . . . an' so it goes on."

"Well, why don't you up an' give notice? An' I'll do the same—all on us'll do the same. I'm fair sick of the place . . ." Young Bates spoke bitterly. "Wot's 'e want to keep 'orses for? 'E don't ride, 'e don't drive, 'e's give up racing. 'E don't take no sort of interest in any of it. Let's get out before we're pushed out."

"There's bin a lat o' sickness among the 'orses," Bates said half-apologetically. "'Tain't our fault neither, nor carelessness, but we've never had no luck since 'e sent Miss Raby's goat away. If you want good 'ealth among the 'orses, keep a goat."

"'Tis you as be the goat," his son said bitterly. "I likes my wages reg'lar, and some stir and life about the place: an' Mr. Verdon's too pecooliar for my fancy. I wouldn't be 'ard on a gentleman for drinkin' —though I'm a sober chap myself—but when it comes to them chemicals I say it's time to clear out. time for all on us to clear out, an' you thinks the same only you be that obstinate and soft-'earted."

Bates sighed heavily: "I'll 'ave another try," he said patiently. "If I gives 'em somethin' on account p'raps that'll quiet 'em a bit."

"There comes a time," his son said meaningly. "when a pair of breeches be too bad to patch any more."

Down the lane tripped Raby, happily conscious of her nice clothes, with the hope that her agreeable

appearance might make a favourable impression upon Gran. The stream was full and the water was running over the lock-gates at the mill. She stood for a minute to watch great bags of flour being lowered by a crane on to a cart, then crossed the foot bridge to a path that bordered fields, just then tenanted by a famous herd of "Gloucester Old Spot"

pigs.

As she neared the bit of stream bounded by Gran's garden on the other side, she came on a litter of very new, very clean, little pink and black pigs that thrilled her with admiration. They were so comic, so pretty, so absurdly quick and busy. One of them was evidently of an adventurous disposition, for while his mama and the rest of his family trotted inland as fast as they could go, he stayed behind and strayed to the very edge of the stream. Something held his absorbed attention, either a water-rat or a trout. He scrambled half-way down the bank, when suddenly the loose soil gave under his feet, and in spite of frantic efforts to turn and save himself he lost his footing altogether and fell into the stream with despairing squeals.

The river path was deserted. Not a human soul was in sight save Raby. Mama and brothers were right across the field and the rest of the piglets were making such a noise that she was deaf to the cries of the truant. The current was strong and she saw that the piglet would be swept along to the dam and washed over. There was no time to run and get help. She kicked off her good suede brogues, tore off her hat and coat, and jumped in. The little pig was by this time well in the centre, where the water was both deep and very cold. She could swim—Jim Chester had seen to that—and in spite of hampering

58 RABY

weeds and the strong current she managed to catch hold of the struggling pig and made for some stone steps on the garden side of the bank.

There she put the little pig ashore and with loud squeals it immediately dashed through the shrubs that screened the stream from the garden. She scrambled on to the path drenched and shivering, just as Bannister ran out of his tool house to catch the marauding pig, and Gran and some visitors came out of the house to join in the hunt. She wondered wildly if she could possibly get away before they saw her. But the only way to the bridge in the road was through the garden and stable yard or back across the stream. She felt she could not face the icy water again, for her teeth were chattering. So just as Bannister caught the pig in the young spinach, a deplorable, dripping damsel appeared on the lawn.

Then things happened quickly. Gran hustled her indoors and into a hot bath, telephoned to Leadon Hall, and by the time she was sitting up in bed wrapped in a big blanket, drinking hot milk and feeling something of a heroine, Biddy had arrived from home with dry clothes. Bannister had restored the pig to his family and Gran rejoined her guests. There was nothing to stay in bed for, though of course Biddy foretold all sorts of evil consequences from what she called "the result of these sudden immersions," illustrating the same with dates scrupulously attached.

As Mrs. Bannister took tea into the dining-room Raby came downstairs. While attending to her, Gran had explained that the pretty young lady was her daughter; the tall clergyman her son-in-law; and the young man, his brother. He, it appeared, was staying the night on his way to Oxford, while Mr. and Mrs. Shaw were returning by train.

At tea Cicely was so extremely possessive in her manner towards her mother and what Raby mentally called "the rather-decent-looking parson" that she contrived to make the child feel thoroughly out of it; and Austin Shaw stared at her in such a cool appraising fashion that instead of glowing as a heroine she became uncomfortably conscious of being a tiresome little girl who had butted in and caused a commotion at a thoroughly inconvenient time.

Austin, too, was tall and decent-looking, with smooth hair brushed back from a thoughtful fore-head. He was, in addition, so clean and well-tailored, so deliberate and assured, that—undesired as she felt herself to be—Raby longed to challenge him in some way and prove him less universally accomplished than he appeared.

As usual she was hungry and had the fault of most people who are often alone at meals of eating far too fast. With a solicitous politeness that she felt certain concealed some ironical intention, the resplendent Austin never failed to hand her something new the moment a hiatus occurred, with the result that she had eaten more and finished sooner than any other member of the party.

Cicely and her husband sitting on either side of Gran monopolised her; and took, what seemed to Raby, an eternity over their tea.

Austin kept pressing cakes upon her long after she had finished and at last she said crossly: "I've already told you I'm through—what d'you keep on for?"

"I thought you might change your mind. You seemed hungry."

"I was hungry, and now I've eaten such a lot I'm not hungry any more. D'you hunt?"

"Occasionally."

"Where?"

ŀ

Į

"Generally with the Bicester."

"Why only occasionally, can't you get two days a week?"

"I can't-I'm at Oxford, you see."

Raby didn't see, but she wasn't going to say so. "Hunting's over here," she announced. "We never kill a May fox here—do you know this country?"

"I've never been here before, but I understand people may ride in Lord Leadon's Park. I thought

of hiring a gee and hacking there tomorrow."
"We could mount you," Raby announced magni-"If you like you can come out with me instead of young Bates. I ride every morning."

At that moment Gran made a move. Finding that Biddy had not waited for her, Raby hastened to say

good-bye.

"I'll see Miss Verdon home," Austin said with unexpected amiability. "I want a stroll. I'll walk back with her along the stream."

"I don't want anybody to see me home that ridiculous little way," Raby said ungraciously, "but you can come if you like."

Austin went.

"Very good-natured of Austin," was Cicely's comment. "I know that flappers bore him to extinction, and if I may say so, Mummy darling, that particular flapper seems very dull. Don't let her prey upon you, whatever you do. Little girls who think they can turn up at any time that suits them, when they've nothing better to do, can be a frightful nuisance."

"She has only been once before," Gran said, "and I asked her to come and see me again. I like

her."

"She's a pretty child," Frank Shaw interposed charitably, "and she couldn't help getting wet, you know."

ENTER AUSTIN

"That's just what she could have helped," Cicely retorted. "There was no earthly need for her to go plunging into the stream after that pig. If she'd waited a few minutes some more competent person—Mummy's gardener, for instance—would have heard it and pulled it in with a rake or something. I wish she had stayed away today anyhow. She lost us quite half-an-hour of your dear society, dearest."

CHAPTER VIII

INTERPLAY

IF, as Vereker Verdon declared, the sensible person is the one who, "before he puts himself out for anyone else, considers 'Now, how is this going to benefit me?' "-then Austin Shaw was undoubtedly most sensible. Moreover, his character ought further to have commended itself to Vereker inasmuch as he knew quite definitely what he wanted, and how he was going to set about getting it.

When Austin was nearly eighteen a considerate god-father died, leaving him an income of some six hundred a year when he should reach twenty-one. though a clause in the will prevented him touching the capital until he was twenty-six. After that the money was his absolutely, to deal with as he pleased. This agreeable circumstance naturally made changes in Austin's plans, but only in so far as it rendered it easier to reach the goal he had in view.

He was already in his last year at school and preparing for the university. His mother at considerwhile sucrifice had arranged that he should, if he got a achilarship, have three years at Oxford. Her elder mus brank was already successfully launched in the church. Her two daughters, who came between him and Austin, were self-supporting, one married and the wher a successful teacher in a girls' college. Her son had always been her favourite and, so far, had amply justified her affection by his irreproachable career at school and by what she fondly described

as his "gift for making such nice friends."

From the time Austin first went to a preparatory school his friends had always been in a better social position, and more comfortably placed as regards its attributes, than he was himself. With this unexpected accession to what was, for a young bachelor with no expectations, a comfortable competence, Austin felt that more than ever was it necessary to focus his aims upon a single objective—the attainment of an assured and distinguished position. He had no time to waste upon friends who did not, or were not, by virtue of influence or affluence likely to assist him in his desire to "get there." At the same time he did not neglect humbler acquaintances if it happened that they could be useful to him, and he was careful over money; never spending it at hotels if he knew anyone in the neighbourhood obliging enough to put him up. And he always followed up such visits with a polite and suitable "Collins" before he consigned his hosts to the waste-paperbasket of his memory.

On leaving school he decided to forego the scholarship he had won at Exeter College and to go to the "House" instead. There he continued "to make nice friends" and was in a very good set. His family had an almost worshipful admiration for him, so handsome, so successful, so entirely correct. Though they would at times laughingly declare that Austin was "too fashionable" for the rest of them.

they were immensely proud of him.

When it suited him he stayed with his relatives and though superior, after the manner of young Oxford, he was always good-humoured and affectionate. On his way back from a visit to "nice friends" in ' wickshire he had proposed himself to the F Shaws for three nights. The Warwickshire fr were very definite as to their dates, and it didn't worth while to go back to Malvern, where his m was living. To their really poignant regret, I and Cicely could only put him up for two nigh their spare room was needed for a visiting deacon on the third, and no member of the f dreamt of asking Austin to accept anything i nature of a shake-down. So Cicely proposed he should spend the night at her mother's hous the stream if he cared to do so in the evening, they left to entertain their Archdeacon, and, felt so inclined, explore Lord Leadon's famous next morning. He fell in with the suggestion good-humouredly and declared on arrival th would "hire a gee" and ride in the park next d

When that queer flapper offered him a more accepted it without hesitation. It would save sovereign, and it was more amusing to ride wit a child than all alone. Besides, Mrs. Underwood said they kept a lot of horses—probably glad 'em exercised.

Austin had not ridden much. His childhousement in Harley Street, where his father was a arrive successful surgeon, and riding had never a fratture of the summer holidays. After his tokach which happened just before he went to which his mother had no money for pleasures mut. When he came into his legacy he had human. They we there times during the withhund the human—from a considerable.

shr must men of him broad rede. He

nervous, but his coolness and self-confidence did not in the least deceive the livery stables, and they took care always to supply him with horses that were slow and safe. As a rule, with his usual instinct for the right mental attitude, he refrained from talking horse; but to Raby on their way to her home he discoursed patronisingly on what he supposed to be the only subject she would understand, and she instantly perceived that he knew nothing about it.

At the high wooden gates leading to the stable yard she dismissed him abruptly after bidding him be there next morning at ten sharp.

"Remember, I shan't wait a minute if you're late,"

and she shut the gate behind her with a slam.

He did not tell Gran he had arranged to ride with Raby. People of her generation were fussy and old-fashioned about that sort of thing. Nor did Raby mention the appointment to any member of her household. Indeed she felt a diffidence as to approaching old Bates about the matter. He was so finnicky about his horses. He'd want to know all sorts of things about the gentleman that she couldn't possibly tell him. Her mind misgave her more and more.

Suppose this serenely superior young man couldn't ride at all.

Suppose he fell off.

Suppose he broke something, or worse still let his horse down.

Hastily she reviewed the stables. Her own mare, Romance, had beautiful manners certainly; but she was young and given on starting to playful dances sideways and frisky jumps that might be exceedingly embarrassing to the novice she suspected Austin to be. Young Bates, when he rode behind her, always

66 RABY

chose a horse that needed exercise and was, in consequence, extremely fresh. Her father hadn't ridden for over three months, but Lucifer, his "confidential charger," was still in the stables, a nice old thoroughbred exercised by Bates himself.

Could she possibly get hold of Lucifer? They always said an infant in arms would be safe on his

back, he was so clever.

Anyway she'd say nothing this evening. Perhaps it would pour with rain and that awfully tidy Austin wouldn't turn up. She looked at the sky. It was fair and clear. Not much hope that way. After all, if she rushed them, if Austin was actually there they couldn't refuse to mount him. They surely never would shame her to that extent. Old Bates was the difficulty. He was so horribly conscientious. He might insist on asking "the Master" and then—oh my goodness!—the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance.

Well, well, perhaps they wouldn't make a fuss. Anyway it was no use worrying beforehand. She had all her father's gambling instincts and she left it light-heartedly to chance. She had seen Vereker each day since she had dined with him. He seemed better, was quite amiable, and always mentioned something about another governess.

All the more reason then to have what fun she could before the creature came.

She'd give that prim young man a bucketing before she'd done with him.

"I'll learn him to come the consequential over me," thought Raby.

A perfect May morning. Austin, in irreproachable riding kit, with breeches that proclaimed the artist in Savile Row that built them, and boots made, he declared, by the only man in London who knew how to make riding-boots, looked in full harmony with the morning.

Gran, who had, hitherto, always felt he was too good to be true, quite warmed to this youthful Adonis: "Shall Bannister fetch your horse for you?" she suggested kindly. But Austin wouldn't hear of troubling Bannister and Gran watched him start, rather surprised that he should choose to go by the stream, which was certainly the longest way into Casterly.

The goddess Chance had so far favoured Raby. Her father never got up before eleven, and to her joy, when she went down to the stable-yard to arrange about her ride, she found that old Bates had gone to Newmarket by an early train and wouldn't be back before the next evening, and that young Bates wanted to go to a sale in the town and was quite pleased that she wouldn't need him that morning. The gentleman could ride Kentucky, who'd be the better for a good breather, full of beans he was.

Raby, however, demurred as to Kentucky. She didn't know much about the gentleman's riding. He was a friend of Mrs. Underwood's. Perhaps something quieter would be more suitable. What about Lucifer?

"If he's an elderly gent, Lucifer'd be best for sure. Had Mr. Verdon said which 'orse he'd like 'im to 'ave?"

"No," her father had not said any particular horse. She had not bothered her father. She would take it on herself. She was sure Lucifer would be safest. Young Bates felt doubtful but it was ten chances to one that Mr. Verdon would not know anything about

68 RABY

it, and he wanted to go to the sale. Therefore he gave instructions to a younger groom and departed himself.

Raby walked about the yard whistling and tapping her boot with her crop. It was such a lovely morning she felt even more reckless than usual, and after all it was a rag!

On the stroke of ten Austin appeared. Little as he knew about horses, he realised the magnificence of the mount they gave him, and wished with all his heart that someone had been handy with a camera to photograph him as they rode out of the yard.

Romance, he decided, was unpleasantly skittish. She was not accustomed to another horse side by side with her, and she danced down the road in a fashion so fidgetty and full of unexpected bounds and pirouettes that Austin found her neighbourhood decidedly disconcerting, afraid, as he was, that she might upset the more dignified Lucifer.

All the same he found time to note with surprise that Raby was quite unconscious of these antics, though she seemed poised on her saddle as lightly as a butterfly on a spray of hedge parsley. She rode astride, and she, too, wore admirable boots and breeches. Her coat was loose but old and rather short, and but for her thick plait of hair she looked like a graceful boy.

A few minutes brought them to Lord Leadon's Park, where happy horsemen can gallop for miles on perfect grass.

Austin wished that Raby wouldn't whirl round him in so bewildering a fashion while all the time he was conscious that she surveyed him with a calm scrutiny as searching as his own at less hectic moments.

"Your breeches are a lot better than your seat,"

said unkindly, "and you've worse than no hands.

Don't jab at your reins. You leave it all to Lucifer. He's looking puzzled . . . and you'd better not go and offend him . . . there, there, Romance, don't be so silly. . . . Now! . . ."

The "breather" that Raby, quoting Bates, would have described as "sittin' in a rockin' chair" took Austin's breath away both literally and figuratively. Raby passed him like a flash and then he was only conscious of the soft thud of hoofs on the turf and a sense of a strong body cleaving the air. As Lucifer settled into his stride, poor Austin was convinced he was running away. He lost his hat, he lost his stirrup. He clutched his saddle and nearly lost his The wind whistled in his hair and the landscape rushed past him. He made no attempt to check or turn Lucifer, for whatever else he lost he dung piously to Raby's warning not to offend. Lucifer continued to be puzzled, but came to the conclusion that the strange thing on his back was not malevolent, only stupid.

Presently a rabbit ran across the sward just in front of them, and it was a point of honour with Lucifer to shy at a rabbit. Quite gently he swerved in his stride, Austin shot over his shoulder, and at this ignominious moment Raby, who was still some twenty yards ahead, turned and looked behind her. Lucifer, astonished now as well as puzzled, slowed up and stopped to see what was the matter.

Austin picked himself up, a bit shaken, but not much the worse. He ran after Lucifer and reached him just as Raby trotted up.

"Are you hurt?" she asked. "However did you

manage to fall off?"

"I was dreaming, I suppose. I'm not a bit hurt, thanks—he shied, you know."

Raby grinned: "Where's your hat?"

"It blew off some time ago, but I wasn't g break into the middle of such a glorious gallop for it. We can get it as we go back."

"Perhaps we'd better go back and get it no

if you feel like going on . . ."

"Let's go on by all means," said Austin.

Lucifer stood like a lamb while Austin m less serene and assured than usual. He looke a trifle sheepish, but extraordinarily handson vigorous with his usually smooth hair lifted and

by the wind.

Raby found herself liking him rather. can't ride, you know," she said confidentially walked the horses back in the direction of the hat, "and you shouldn't pretend you can—tha I put you on Lucifer, he's so safe. You're a to learn now I'm afraid, but you might implot even yet, if you persevere."

"I'm rather out of practice, I expect," answered with unexpected meekness. "Do

what you think I do wrong."

CHAPTER IX

THE OUTER WORLD INTRUDES

VEREKER couldn't sleep. Even through the thick green blinds the brightness of the morning intruded upon his consciousness. Besides, a thrush was making such a confounded row outside, and if the thrush ceased for a moment a blackbird took it up, and a couple of jackdaws conversing in a distant elm were simply infernal.

Only ten o'clock, too!—and he usually drowsed on till mid-day. He was feeling rather better these last few days. Perhaps it would do him good to have a ride. He might take Raby. The Park must be looking at its best just now. He'd go round to the stables anyway—just to show them that he was master. There'd be plenty to find fault with—always was. Old Bates had gone to Newmarket, he remembered, about those two-year-olds. He hoped they'd have a decent sale.

By the time he had bathed, dressed, and had some coffee he felt quite energetic. He sent for Raby but was told she had already gone out riding. Oh, well, he'd go after her. Tell young Bates to saddle Lucifer and bring him round.

Jenkins came back looking like a dignified automaton: "Young Bates is not in the yard, sir, and the young gentleman riding with Miss Raby has taken Lucifer."

"Young gentleman!" Vereker gasped. "What young gentleman? What the devil do you mean?"

"I'm only repeating, sir, the message that was given me from the stables, but I believe a young gentleman has gone riding with Miss Raby today, sir."

Verdon swore, but asked no more questions. He went to the stables himself.

Iles, the groom, could only repeat that young Bates had ordered him to saddle Lucifer, that a young gentleman had come and that he and Miss Raby had ridden out together. She had said they would be back before lunch.

Before lunch! And it was now only just eleven o'clock! He was almost speechless with fury. He went round the horses and had them all out into the yard one after another.

Iles and the lad cringed and trembled before him. He said very little but he looked, so Iles told young Bates afterwards, "like a bull when the ring has tore his nose." He took as long as he possibly could over his inspection of the stables, in the hope that his daughter and her unknown and astonishingly impudent companion might return while he was there, and that he might reduce them both to pulp. But they did not come, and even for that supreme satisfaction he couldn't wait about the yard all the morning. It was hot in the stable-yard. His anger and his unusual activity had exhausted him. Even the baiting of Iles and his subordinate palled after a bit. There was really very little to find fault with, and the horse he most wanted to see—his own horse—the horse he always rode—the horse he wanted to ride that very morning—had been taken. Taken by his daughter's orders and lent to some cad he had never

heard of. The fellow must be a cad or he would never have ridden another man's horse without

asking his leave.

Raby was beginning early. He really had thought she was too young for anything of that sort. But it seemed she was no better than the rest of them. He supposed she met the fellow out hunting—but how dared she?—how dared she mount him on Lucifer? If it had been one of the other horses—Boston or Kentucky—it would have been bad enough, but Lucifer . . .!

How dared she lend any horse of her father's without his permission? How dared they do it in the stables without asking him?

Was he a cipher in his own house? Did they think because he didn't spend all his time poking

and prying about that he was a nonentity?

He rang furiously for a whisky and soda, and then rang for his letters. They had been placed on the breakfast tray but he had been in too great a hurry to look at them. Yes, there was one from his elder sister-in-law:

My dear Vereker,

I was indeed glad to hear from you after such a long silence. It has always been a matter for much regret that we should not have been permitted to see anything of our dear sister's child or you. But I will not reproach you. You ask my help, therefore I gladly give it; and it happens most opportunely that I believe I know of a lady who would be an ideal governess for Raby. She is an old friend of our own, a lady of good social position and accustomed to the highest circles. Her family have met with losses, and, although she is not actually de-

pendent on her own exertions for a living, she is willing to take a position as housekeeper or governesshousekeeper, which is, I suppose, what you require. Her name is Miss Frederica Gransmore, and she is at the present moment staying with us. Should you prefer a personal interview she will gladly come to see you at Casterley, provided her fare is paid both ways. She has the usual accomplishments and is not, I am happy to say, one of those advanced unfeminine women who are so sadly numerous in these days. She is thoroughly nice and refined in every respect and would, we are sure, be the very best influence for dear Raby. She cannot offer you other references, as teaching has not hitherto been her avocation. In fact, she has had no need to do anvithing of the sort, but she is certain that she can do all that is required, and for my part I feel sure that you will be more than fortunate if you secure her. The salary you offer, £100 a year all found, will be quite satisfactory. She is not grasping and I need not say I am sure that if she comes to you, you will see that she is treated with every consideration and respect. You mention that you wish us to find you someone as soon as possible. Miss Gransmore would be willing to come to you on Tuesday, five days from now, should you wish her to do so. In that case she would, of course, need to hear from you by return of post. My sister Alice joins me in kind remembrances, and I remain.

Yours very sincerely, EMILY STONE.

The woman, Vereker reflected, as he stuffed Aunt Emily's letter into his pocket, is probably a fool—is probably quite uneducated. But she can surely keep

an eye on Raby and see that she doesn't go riding with strange young men on my horses. I should like to catch them. The hussy has impudence for anything and ten to one will ride with him up to the front-door.

He looked at his watch. Half-past twelve. Surely they wouldn't be long now. He took his hat and went out. Down the drive he went, and when he reached the open gates stood for a minute looking up the road.

Two girls were waiting there also, just outside—rather pretty girls. He had the feeling that he had seen them before somewhere, and as he stood waiting he was sure one of them "gave him the glad eye." He returned the glance with interest. What were they hanging about his gate for? One girl poked the other, evidently urging her to do something.

Vereker walked out of the drive towards them and, lifting his hat, said amiably, "Anything I can do for you? Do you want anyone up at the house?"

Lil pushed Babs forward. "Do you happen to know," Babs asked, "whether Miss Verdon has come in yet?"

"I believe not," Verdon said, quite in a different tone. "Do you want to see her?"

"We wanted to see her come back," Babs continued. "At least," she amended, "we wanted to see her when she got back."

Never was there such a change in a man's expression. Babs retreated hastily into line with her sister. What a very odd man! What was he glaring like that for, all of a sudden?

"Perhaps you can tell us when she will be in," she continued, nervously.

"I can't," Vereker said, still in that curiously curt

fashion. "Perhaps you will be good enough to give me your names, then I can tell Miss Verdon that you called."

"We only wanted to see her as she passed. But it doesn't signify in the least. Good morning!"

And the two girls turned and walked away very fast indeed.

Verdon gazed after them.

He really was a much-tried man at that minute. Conscious of a new and praiseworthy interest in his daughter, he had got up earlier than usual that he might ride with her, only to find that she had already gone out and taken his favourite horse for somebody else. And, as if that was not enough, he then discovers that she has apparently struck up a friendship -a clandestine friendship—with two girls of a type -yes, he was sure he was not mistaken as to the type—that she had no possible business to know at all. How she contrived to know them was a mystery: but it was evident that something must be done and done at once. He watched the hastily departing backs of Lil and Babs till they turned out of the lane leading to his drive from the highroad, and were lost to sight. Then he went back to the house, and, through it, into the stable-yard.

By going down the drive he had just missed them. Iles was leading the riderless horses to the stable, and her father came face to face with Raby as she was coming in and he was going out.

By a common impulse they both stopped dead.

"I'll thank you to answer a few questions now at once," Verdon remarked, with dangerous calm. "Come into my room."

He waited for Raby to pass him and followed her.

Neither of them spoke till they reached the library. Verdon shut the door and sat down at his desk. Raby stood facing him, her face utterly devoid of expression. Her brown eyes met his own with the clear, fearless gaze that he always unconsciously resented.

"Now," he said, "will you have the goodness to explain what you mean by your conduct this

morning?"

"I didn't mean anything particular," Raby answered. "He said he wanted to ride in the Park and I offered to mount him. We have a lot of horses."

"Just so, and in spite of that fact you chose to mount this person on my horse. Surely you had some reason for that?"

"Yes; I put him on Lucifer because I was pretty sure he couldn't ride very well—Lucifer was so safe."

"Did it not occur to you that I might have been consulted before you lent a stranger my horse?"

"Yes," Raby said again, "but I knew if I asked you you'd say 'No,' and you never do ride now—at

least, you haven't for a very long time."

"That has nothing to do with it. Are the horses mine, or are they not? And who is the gentleman who has been riding my horse? What do you know about him?"

"Not much," Raby acknowledged, "but I met him yesterday at Mrs. Underwood's."

"Who is Mrs. Underwood?"

"Oh, she's all right, Father. Even you wouldn't object to her. You can ask the Chesters. They know her well."

"I can and do object to your visiting anyone without my permission. Who on earth are those two raffish-looking girls I have seen hanging about here lately? Are they friends of Mrs. Underwood's?"

"No, Father, not that I know of. They are Lil

and Babs, friends of mine."

"Where did you pick them up?"

"At the pictures."

"At the pictures!" Verdon repeated scornfully. "And what were you doing at the pictures?"

"I went to see them. Sometimes Bates took me, sometimes Biddy. They sat next me. We got talking, and I have seen them two or three times since and been out with them."

"Been out with them! Where?"

"I went to church with them last Sunday. They took me. They're very good-natured girls, and they're young, although they're older than me.' Raby paused, and then added, "I don't see many people of my own age."

"Was your friend this morning of your own age?"

"No; he was older than me, too, but he wasn' very old—not really."

"Now, Raby, tell me the truth," Verdon said "What made you want to take him riding with you?"

Hitherto Raby's face had been very sad an solemn, but now it suddenly relaxed, and she smiled "Because," she said, "he was so sidey that wanted to show him I could do something a jolly sigh better than him. And," she added, gleefully, "h learnt quite a lot."

"Are you telling me the whole truth?" looking a

her keenly.

"If you are afraid about Lucifer, Father, he is perfectly all right. That boy fell off once, but it didn't hurt Lucifer."

"How long is 'that boy,' as you call him, staying with Mrs. Underwood?"

"He is going back to Oxford today, Father; so he said."

For quite a minute Vereker continued to stare at his daughter as though he would read her very soul.

"You have behaved very badly," he said at last. "You have shown me that you can't be trusted without someone to look after you all the time. I have to leave here on Monday for a fortnight, but a new governess will come on Tuesday, and I hope you will try to behave better to her than you have in the past. What are you looking at me like that for?"

Raby was indeed looking exceedingly puzzled.

This heavy-father sort of tone was something quite new with Vereker, and she couldn't understand it all, but all she said was: "Where did you get her?"

"Your Aunt Emily has arranged that a friend of hers will come, but I warn you that if she finds it impossible to stay with you . . ." He paused and frowned.

"Yes, Father—if she won't stay . . .?"

"You will have to go to school." Seeing that Raby did not look in the least depressed by this tremendous threat, he added spitefully, "and there you'll find out what a shamefully ignorant young fool you are. You will have a rotten time."

"I don't suppose all the girls are so frightfully dever," she muttered.

"Possibly not, but they're not all likely to be so frightfully big, and most of them will have had some sort of training. Even you won't exactly enjoy being made a laughing-stock."

Raby looked at her father in the grave considering way that he found so disconcerting.

"I don't suppose I shall," she said quietly, "but I daresay I can stick it."

There was something patient and inscrutable about

8o RABY

the child that suddenly intrigued him, and the flame of his anger died down. He felt extraordinarily tired, but curious. Why didn't she cry when he set upon her? Now when he came to think of it he had not seen Raby cry for years. This was unusual and interesting. All the women he had known cried at times. Why didn't she?

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"I was wondering why you should seem so glad people would laugh at me. I shouldn't be glad if they laughed at you. I should be stuffy if they made game of you, however queer you are—yet I don't

know why I should."

"I don't either," Vereker acknowledged, "but it's decent of you to feel like that. Now look here—you do your best to get on with this woman your aunts are sending. She can't be such a fool but she can probably teach you something. Remember, if I am queer so are you. But I'm too old to change and you're not. Will you give me your word not to go out of your way to make her life intolerable?"

"But you said," she objected, "if she didn't stay I'd have to go to school, and whether they make game of me or not I'd like that because there'd be other girls. If I'm too nice to her she might want

to stop on and on, and then what'd I do?"

"You can't possibly go to school this term anyhow, and if you go in the autumn you'd miss the hunting, and how would you like that? Anyway promise me that you'll try and be decent to her till I come back from London. You can go now and you'd better have your lunch upstairs for I'm tired to death, and can't talk any more. Do you promise?"

"Yes, I'll promise that," Raby said, suddenly smiling broadly, "because she's pretty certain not to

stop long after you get back."

CHAPTER X

CONCERNING "IN-LAWS"

"HAVE you taken back Miss Verdon's things?"
Gran asked Bannister that afternoon when Austin had departed.

"Yes 'm, I did. I took 'em this marnin' about ten o'clock, an' the missus says her clothes 'as suffered a

deal more than the pig."

"It's a pretty old place, isn't it, Bannister?"

"Ah," said Bannister, beaming as he wagged his head in appreciation, "and ain't it a pretty young lady as lives there? She was ridin' out of the lane just as I turned in, and when she's on a 'orse she's like a chime o' bells. I've seen some of the best riders in the shires in my time, but I 'aven't seen one as had a better seat nor a nicer way with a 'orse. That gentleman as you had stoppin' wasn't a patch on 'er."

"Was he with her then?" Gran asked surprisedly,

before she could stop herself.

"Yes'm, they rode out of the lane together just as I come along. She'd mounted 'im something like. A thoroughbred 'e was on, one of the best 'orses I've seen round 'ere."

"I don't quite understand," Gran said. "Do you mean that Mr. Verdon had lent Mr. Austin Shaw a horse?"

Bannister grinned again. "I wouldn't go so far

as to say Mr. Verdon lent 'im a 'orse, 'm—b was Mr. Verdon's own 'orse 'e was on right eno for the groom in the yard told me so."

Bannister was rather disappointed that Gran not pursue the subject. She left him abruptly went back to her seat under the umbrella tree.

At luncheon Austin had been enthusiastic a his delightful morning. He had mentioned that had met Raby and that they rode in the Parl gether. But he contrived to give Gran the imposion that he met her in the Park and, without sait in so many words, that his mount came from livery stables.

Now she came to think of it, he certainly had n actually mentioned the livery stables, only tha had had a capital horse.

Gran felt decidedly annoyed with Austin. was, moreover, uncomfortably certain that I must have mounted him without consulting her fa For from all she had heard of Vereker Verdon felt that it was unlikely he would, on his daugh recommendation, have been so amiable to some he had not even seen.

Gran felt that it put her in a false position. odious position, for it looked as though she had sumed upon her acquaintance with the child to r use of the father, whom she did not know, for benefit of her guest.

The more she thought about it the stronger is her desire to proclaim her innocence to Ver Verdon. But she could not do that without gi away Austin and perhaps getting Raby into tro

Just as she was beginning to like Austin be It seemed such a pity. He had been so plead had thanked her so prettily when he left, asking might come again. She had felt quite kindly towards him. Hitherto she had been rather lukewarm in her appreciation: a natural reaction perhaps from the excessive adulation of his own family. The Shaws thought so much of Austin and all bowed down before him with such admirative humility. Always, hitherto, he had seemed to her both conceited and selfish. Now he seemed underhand as well!

Tim's green jersey was finished and Cicely had taken it back with her. A very small pair of brown stockings with green tops was now the work on hand. Gran's cheeks were pink and she knitted very fast: and as the stocking lengthened so did she grow less perturbed and began to take a more charitable view of Austin's conduct. He had known that if he mentioned that he was going to ride with Raby on one of her father's horses his hostess would insist on his obtaining that father's permission. Therefore he had not mentioned it; which was youthful and natural. Moreover, the Shaws were not a sporting family. Probably Austin did not realise how sacred is a man's horse, or gun, or fishing rod.

There is a great difference of view-point between those who are sportsmen by tradition and environment and those who acquire such tastes later in life. Gran began to make excuses for Austin. After all, if Mr. Verdon did think she was that dreadful pushing sort of person it didn't matter very much . . . except that he might forbid Raby to come any more.

That possibility was so agitating that she got up and walked about the garden.

That would matter. Though she had only seen the child three times she felt that fate had swept them together for some purpose. Gran was essentially the maternal woman and all the mother in her 84 RABY

cried out for Raby, the unwanted, neglected child She longed to make it up to her in some small measur for all she had missed: for all she had never known She knew that had she the opportunity she could giv Raby three precious things—love, sympathy an understanding.

Would Vereker Verdon revenge himself fo Austin's lack of savoir faire by keeping his daughte away from Little Leadon? Gran acknowledged tha he would be justified should he do so. But if he di she was not at all sure that she wouldn't be ready t

sacrifice Austin to justify herself.

Perhaps the Chesters might be able to do some thing—and at that moment as she turned in her rest less pacing to and fro she saw Mrs. Chester herself portly and placid, sitting under the umbrella tree.

"I guessed you'd be in the garden," Mrs. Cheste said, "so I came in without ringing. I've bee watching you for quite two minutes. Why were yo prowling round and round like a bear in a cage What's the matter? Has Johnny got mumps, o what?"

"Oh, Agnes, I was just thinking about you

You're the very person I wanted to see."

"I've been to Leadon Hall to leave a new crop fo Raby. She's fourteen tomorrow. Of course sh was out and I didn't ask for Vereker. Without Jir we should come to blows. Now tell me, what' worrying you?"

Gran told her.

"Young monkeys," Mrs. Chester chuckled. "Te to one Vereker will never know anything about is He doesn't get up till goodness knows when. An even if he did know, though he'd naturally be cross—anyone would be cross—I don't think he'd forbi Raby to come and see you. I'm rather glad, for i

will show him he must put someone in charge of her since he's no good himself. Jim talked to him the other day about the child and says he thinks that Vereker begins to have a faint—a very faint—sense of responsibility."

"It shows," said Gran, "how lonely she is that

she asked Austin to ride with her."

"I'm not sure of that, she probably asked him out of sheer devilry. Jim told him he must either get a governess or send the child to school. We happen to know he's off to Town next week, and it's wicked to leave her with only the servants."

"I wish he'd let me have her while he's away, but I suppose that's hopeless. Why should he? He

knows nothing about me."

"Oh, he'd not let her stay with you. She never does stay with anyone but us—not that she's asked. poor child—and she's very seldom been to us, and then only for a day or two. Once when they first came, about three years ago, I knew he was away and went in and fetched her. But he didn't like it and an impossible governess appeared shortly after, and will again this time, you'll see. He has a genius for getting hold of reach-me-down women that no one else would have at a gift. His sense of responsibility seems to wake when hunting's over, because, I suppose, Raby's more en evidence. It's a shame she shouldn't have any education, for she's not stupid and rather likes lessons than otherwise. However, I didn't come to talk about Raby. I want to know all about Cicely and Frank. Was Cicely pleased with your quarters?—and was Frank in-lawish?"

"What d'you mean, exactly, by in-lawish?"

"My dear, if you'd got as many in-laws as I have with four married sons, you wouldn't ask."

"I'm very fond of my solitary in-law."

"Now, Esther, don't be discreet and charitable and the boring sort of person who 'never says a word against anyone'—I always suspect such people of being either incredibly dull or thoroughly deceitful."

Gran laughed: "Just before you arrived I was feeling intensely irritated by Austin—I suppose he's

an in-law?"

"Of course he is one of the innumerable ramifications. Immediate in-laws are generally bearable; it's their belongings that are so trying often."

"I daresay they find us trying."

"I daresay they do—in fact I hope with all my heart that they do; it would only be fair."

"What makes you so tartarly today on the subject of in-laws? Has another of the boys got engaged?"

"Not that I know of. I expect it every minute

though, only two left now."

"And yet," Gran said slowly, "I should have said you were so very fortunate. All your sons are happy. All of them have married girls who are good and devoted—girls you know all about, who haven't, any of them, imported any dreadful relations into the family. What's the matter? What is there to grumble at?"

"It's that odious rhyme has been running in my head—it's so absolutely true, you know—'My son's

my son till he gets a wife . . . "

"'My daughter's my daughter all my life,' "Gran added, without the least conviction in her tone. "I don't think that's a bit fair or true. No woman with a scrap of sense expects her daughter to be as much her daughter when she's married as she was before. If she is, then it's not at all fair on the man. I think the real truth is that one's child is one's child for ever and ever, but that while your relationship towards

e child remains the same, the child's relationship wards you is changing all the time, and you've mply got to adapt yourself, otherwise you suffer a t."

"Why should all the adapting come from us?" Its. Chester demanded. "It always makes me hink of the people who advertise in the Church Times is companions 'bright, domestic and adaptable.' I may be domestic but I'm hanged if I'm bright or idaptable. Why shouldn't they be adaptable? Why shouldn't Frank adapt himself to you and those four girls adapt themselves to me?"

"Girls have enough to do adapting themselves to their husbands, without trying to include their belongings. You may take it from me, Agnes, a man's mother is just every bit as trying an in-law as the tirls. You should hear Cicely!"

"Well, I'd like to hear Cicely."

"Oh no, you wouldn't. You'd be furious."

"What does she say?"

"Well, for one thing, that Mrs. Shaw always nanages to put her in the wrong."

"Probably she is in the wrong."

"All the more reason for hating to have it pointed but. No one minds so much being put in the wrong f they're right. Their consciousness of rectitude ustains them. Then she's always so agitated if 'rank has one of his snuffly colds, and frightens licely to death by gloomy reminiscences of distant elatives who died of lung trouble; and if she goes to tay with them she's always too cold or too hot; and ou know all the Shaws are by way of being superior nd literary, and she will ask Cicely if she has read is and that, all of them the newest books, as if licely had time to read much with a very small staff nd those babies, and . . ."

١

"My dear Esther, she might be your mother-inlaw you're so warm about it."

"Well of course, I sympathise with Cicely."

"Do you suppose all the girls go home and abuse me to their mothers?"

"If you're tiresome, I haven't the least doubt

they mention it . . ."

"But what a satisfaction that must be to you! Now the boys never say anything to me about their in-laws—anything interesting, I mean—anything abusive! If they did, I, too, could be noble and large-minded—but men are thoroughly tiresome that way, and it's just that makes one feel they've been so entirely swallowed—gone over body and soul to the in-laws. Upon my word, I can find it in my heart to sympathise with that poor Mrs. Shaw."

"Why should you sympathise? Could a man have a more devoted little wife than Cicely? Or

could you find a sweeter daughter-in-law?"

"Oh, they're all devoted and all sweet! It's a fashion to make a parade of devotion, and when they come home they are so possessive, you know very well they're just trying their best to show you that you count for less than nothing with your own son. Sons-in-law don't do that anyhow."

"They don't need to," Gran said, a little sadly. "A girl's mother is only too conscious of how little, how rightly and necessarily little she's going to count

henceforth. Especially if she's a widow."

Mrs. Chester put out her hand as though to ward off something. "Don't, Esther," she said, "that's the thing I cannot face. If anything happened to Jim and all the boys were married I couldn't bear it."

Mrs. Chester looked so woebegone that Gran said briskly, "Now don't you be like the White Queen in because you're going to scratch your finger

Tuesday week. Tell me more about in-laws. You've had such a varied experience. But first of all tell me this, how did you get on with Jim's mother? She's still alive, isn't she?"

"Very much alive; eighty-four and would like to rule the lot of us still."

"And does she?"

"Oh dear no, though we let her think she does. But we're all very small potatoes now—it's the grandsons who count with her."

"Of course. That's only natural."

"And don't the grandchildren count with Mrs. Shaw?"

"Oh yes—but, you know, she does think Frank and Austin so perfect. She's always rubbing it in how sensible they've always been. How when they were little they never lost their luggage, and how they got scholarships, and when they were at public school they never got into any rows, and how at Oxford they were never extravagant or got drunk, or flirted outrageously, or did any of the things young men usually do. . . ."

"Well anyway, you can't say I swank about my sons like that."

Gran laughed. "You couldn't, you know. They've been very human, all of them, haven't they?"

"And a good thing, too!" Mrs. Chester said stoutly. "I mistrust these perfect young men. They generally do something outrageous in middle life, which is much more serious."

"I don't suppose Frank and Austin differed much from other boys, except that they had the knack of keeping out of trouble, or if they got into mischief weren't found out. Some people are awfully lucky that way." Gran spoke wistfully.

"Austin, evidently, can keep his own counsel."

90

"But, let us keep to the in-law question. I always feel rather sorry for a girl who marries a man whose mother is a widow."

"And what about the man who marries a girl whose mother's a widow?"

"I'm sorry for both of them. There's so much pose about widows. Why should it be considered so much more wonderful for a widow to be a decent mother than a woman with a husband?"

"Well, I suppose because she's got to do it all alone."

"She's got nothing else to occupy her. Why should such reverential gratitude be expected from a man because his mother's a widow? Nobody wastes any pity on the poor boy, who probably hasn't had half the good times in boyhood and early manhood that he'd have had if his father had lived. The widow, as a lonely creature, is a legitimate object of pity, but to penalise children just because their mother is a widow is a shame."

"Well, they ought to be more kind to her."

"If she's a good mother she's a good mother and she doesn't deserve any more credit because she happens to be a widow. The widow fetish is overdone in this country. I'm determined that I'll not make all sorts of absurd claims upon Cicely and Frank just because I happen to be a widow."

"In your case it seems to me the claims are ail from the other side."

"Oh no, they're not. It's horrid to feel everlastingly self-reproachful, and that's what happens to young people when their parents expect too much. What you and I have got to remember is that we must steer our own boats when we put out to sea among the in-laws, and not go bumping into other

craft or swamping just because certain tethering ropes are loosed."

"After all," Mrs. Chester said, "there's something very jolly in belonging to a lot of people. It must be awfully dismal to have next to no belongings, like

that poor Raby."

"That's really why I feel Raby and I should be friends. If you or Jim get a chance, do tell Mr. Verdon I'm not the pushing, grasping sort of person that tiresome Austin has made me seem—though I rather like him for carrying Raby off to ride under the very nose of authority."

"Bless you, he didn't carry her off. She carried him, and I bet you her father knows it. In some ways I fancy he knows Raby better than either of us."

CHAPTER XI

RESULTS

IT was her fourteenth birthday and something had occurred that, for the first time in her life, aroused 2 sense of responsibility in Raby. Yesterday afternoon young Bates had given notice.

It had all happened while she was out in the ponycart with Biddy between lunch and tea. She had driven Biddy far into the Park; ostensibly to show her the bluebells: but really that she might, herself, see again the same places that she had seen with Austin in the morning.

She felt that she had got off pretty lightly as regarded her father's anger about Lucifer; and more than ever was she sure that the escapade was "worth it."

She had never given anyone a lesson in anything before. It was a new, delightful, and most exciting experience. She longed to repeat it. He was such a docile pupil, to, not a bit "sidey" or conceited (though she had thought so at first) when it came to learning to ride.

She did not realise that Austin was one of those really clever people who never fail to seize an opportunity.

The drive was a success. Biddy admired the bluebells, though she did mention that they were unsuitable flowers to lay on graves. Untidy if you put nem in a bunch and wobbly if you tried to stand nem upright in a tin. Biddy liked or disliked all wers according to their suitability for the decoran of graves.

It was when Raby had started undressing to go to d that Biddy told her about young Bates. Whereon Raby put on again everything she had taken had insisted upon seeking young Bates there and en in his father's cottage across the stable yard. The found him and his mother just about to go to bed emselves, for they were early folk.

She argued and pleaded in vain.

Nothing, young Bates declared, would induce him withdraw his notice. He wasn't going to be spoke like that by anyone. If he couldn't take his orders om Miss Raby, then the Master should see to it as e didn't give no orders. Miss Raby had always eated him proper, and if she asked him to do a thing there was no good reason to refuse he wasn't going rainst her.

But when he had taken his orders and had gone off a sale on purpose to see if he could pick up a cornn cheap, and save Mr. Vereker's pocket—to be oke to like that in the stable-yard before Iles, and em lads, and a couple of giggling women listening hind the back door; in the middle of the afternoon, the slack time, when the lot of them had nothing to but listen—it was more than any self-respecting in could be expected to put up with. And he sn't going to put up with it. Not if it was ever

He'd gave his notice; quite respectful he'd gave and Mr. Verdon says, "Well go, and be damned you," and he was going, and that was the last rd he'd got to say.

There was a dour determination about young Bates

that she recognised as impossible to shake. Mrs. Bates, she felt, sided with her son although she was respectfully silent unless directly appealed to. And there was no moving young Bates. He was inflexible. He wanted to leave. That was what hurt Raby.

She went back to the house in the soft, scented dusk, feeling that her world was crumbling about her.

She had been so sure she could placate young Bates. So sure that her father would be quite ready to reinstate him when his anger had cooled. He was like that. He was, so she shrewdly decided, far too lazy to want any change in the staff. But now it was of no use to go to her father.

Young Bates wanted to go.

What if the rest of the servants took to giving notice when her father swore at them?

Suppose Bates himself left!

Or Biddy!

It was unthinkable.

Stable-boys and cooks, indoor menservants and housemaids came and went with every change of abode, but Bates and Biddy made all of home that Raby had ever known. They had even been there in her mother's brief reign at Markways, where she was born. The home she couldn't remember.

It was ten o'clock before she was ready for bed. She refused to discuss the question with Biddy. Young Bates was going. There was no more to be said.

But when Biddy had gone she cried herself to sleep, and, as Vereker had remarked, Raby hardly ever cried. And now she had awakened to this heavy sense of trouble. Trouble brought about by her own act. Young Bates was going because she had ordered him to lend Lucifer to Austin.

One of her father's sayings came into her mind— "The sooner you learn that certain kinds of conduct entail certain, deadly certain, consequences; the sooner you realise that you can't both have your cake and eat it."

Raby had remarked that "there wouldn't be much good in having cake if you didn't eat it," and Vereker had answered, "Exactly, but there are people who ind satisfaction in the knowledge that their cake is in the cupboard. I can't feel that myself. But they do."

Raby dismally reflected that she had eaten her cake and it had given indigestion—not to her, but to

young Bates, which seemed most unfair.

She felt as if she had driven him forth into the world—and yet she couldn't wish she hadn't lent Lucifer to Austin. Oh! it was nice to ride side by side with someone instead of always riding by oneself ever so many yards in front: and he had said he would come again about the third week in June, and they would have another ride and she must give him another lesson. For a minute or two she forgot young Bates in contemplation of this beatific prospect.

Biddy came to call her, bearing four parcels. One long, two square, and one flat and thin. A beautiful new crop from Mr. and Mrs. Chester: a box of chocolates from Biddy, a lovely large box: and a new collar for Sara from Bates, "with best respects and good wishes for a happy life." Bates had left it with Biddy when he went to Newmarket. He never forgot her birthday: and she knew that cook had made a birthday cake covered with white sugar with fourteen pink fondants at regular intervals round the edge like a necklace.

There remained the flat parcel. Who could have sent that?

She opened it and found a padded handkerchief sachet made of violet silk lined with white. Paler violets were embroidered in the four corners and it had a faint delicious scent.

There was a note with it.

MY DEAR RABY,

Many happy returns of the day. I hope you'll keep your handkerchiefs in the little case; I made it myself. I wonder if your father would allow you to come and have luncheon with me on your birthday? I expect you have your special cake for tea, but perhaps he would spare you then. Will you give him my compliments and ask him?

Yours most sincerely,
ESTHER UNDERWOOD.

Biddy was much excited.

"That's a present for a real young lady, Miss Raby," she exclaimed delightedly, "and a most propeletter telling you to ask your pa and all. I do hop he'll let you go."

"But he doesn't get up till ever so late. How car I wait till then to ask him? It will probably be lund time before he comes down, and how can I tell he

in time if he won't let me?"

"He hasn't slept so late these last few days,' Biddy said hopefully, "and when he rings for hi coffee there's no reason why you shouldn't knock a his door and ask him, an' him your pa . . ."

"I wish she hadn't said I'd got to ask him, the

I could just have gone."

"No you couldn't, Miss Raby. You know he

usually expects to see you at lunch. If you wasn't there he'd be certain to ask for you. And after yesterday," Biddy added significantly, "you'd better not go gallivantin' off any more without so much as a by-your-leave. You wait."

There was nothing for it but to hang about and wait. Quite a dozen times between nine and eleven Raby sought Jenkins to know if her father had rung. She hung about the passages and in the hall watched the bell board in the butler's pantry, and, at last, when the bell did ring she failed to hear it, for she had gone to try the new collar on Sara.

But Jenkins was good-natured and told her and the followed him when he took her father's breakfast tray upstairs.

She waited outside the door while Jenkins arranged the tray and was relieved by the apparent peace within. "He can't be very cross," she reflected, "for he hasn't sworn at Jenkins once."

As Jenkins came out she slipped in. "Father, may I speak to you a minute?"

Vereker started and spilled the coffee he was just pouring out.

"Good God, Raby! What do you want at this time of day?" he asked irritably.

Raby advanced to the side of the bed thinking how very unpleasant men looked in bed before they had shaved.

"Mr. and Mrs. Chester's friend at Little Leadon has asked me to lunch today and she said I was to give you her compliments and would you let me go?"

"Is the woman here?"

"No, Father, she wrote a letter."

"Where is it?"

"Here, Father," and Raby produced the precious

missive and handed it to him at arm's length. She had no desire to come very near her father at that moment. His appearance displeased her. It really was very horrid to look grey-green with cheeks and chin a mass of reddish-brown bristles, with dull eyes, the whites all yellowy. Was that how people looked as they grew older?

She was sure Austin didn't look like that in bed. She turned her eyes from her father and gazed out of the window at the tops of some tall beech trees which were exquisite in their young green against the sky. But she didn't see the beech trees. She was thinking of Austin with his hair blown by the wind.

Her father's voice broke up the picture: "So it's

your birthday?"

"Yes, Father."

"And you would like to go to lunch with this Mrs. Underwood?"

"Yes, Father."

"Why?"

"Because I like her. She's kind."

Vereker leaned back wearily upon his piled-up pillows. "Well, you can go, and since it's your birthday you'd better have dinner with me."

"Thank you, Father. May I have my letter?" She seized it and escaped, shutting the door very

softly.

Vereker felt unreasonably hurt by her haste. "Never asked me how I was, never offered to kiss me—on her birthday, too. I'm afraid she's a hard, unnatural child."

And then he fell to pitying himself for feeling so rotten while that brat of his looked and was the picture of health—a dreadful *cliché* that last phrase—but she was a picture . . . perhaps it was a picture of

youth. How short a time it lasts! and when it's gone how little! how damnably little, there is left.

As she came out of her father's room she noticed that a door was open on the opposite side of the wide landing, and she went through it into one of the many woused bedrooms. A housemaid had been in to pull up the blinds and open the latticed windows, for Biddy was most conscientious in seeing that every room in the house was properly aired.

On the wall, facing Raby as she came in, a large old-fashioned mirror was fixed, reaching almost from floor to ceiling. She went and stood in front of it, looking anxiously at her image reflected in the glass. Mrs. Chester had told her she was "like her mother but had her father's colouring," referring to her hair. Now, with Vereker's appearance as she had just seen him, vividly impressed upon her mind, she stared and stared at her reflected self and, honestly, could not think what Mrs. Chester meant.

"Her father's colouring"—

She was brown, certainly, but with rather a nice colour in her cheeks, not whitey-green. And if there was a band of little freckles across the bridge of her nose, the nose, itself, was not stippled, nor bluish-purple round the nostrils.

Hitherto she had been almost indifferent about her appearance. Now she regarded herself quite dispassionately, trying with deliberate intentness to discover wherein her likeness to her father lay.

Surely her face was quite a different shape. Wide across the brows, where his was narrow, and pointed at the chin, where his was wide. And she looked dean and not shiny. Nevertheless, she was conscious that when it came to a comparison with Austin she acked finish; that "awfully tidy" look that she ad-

100 RABY

mired so much in him. She ran over the whole of her acquaintances. None of them had quite that aspect except—she grudgingly admitted it—her father . . . sometimes. Just now and then she had noted in him, without any special appreciation, that air of elegance, that indescribable harmony which is the result of—what?

Raby knitted her brows and thought deeply. No two people could be more unlike than her father and Austin. One old, the other young. One so handsome, the other rather ugly. Yet . . . what was it that her father had in common with the personable Austin?

She'd got it!
It was clothes.

And at that moment there was born in Raby an understanding of the intrinsic beauty of good line.

That was where she failed. Her cotton blouse, made by Biddy, was tight across the chest and short in the sleeve. The shoulders were wrong, for she had grown out of it. Now she knew why she looked best in riding kit. Austin and her father had all their clothes made by the people who made riding things. So would she. "If I've got to be like father," she decided, "I'll be like him in that. Biddy must make my blouses better or she shan't make them at all. Anyway dressmakers' things were always tearing, and"—she turned from the glass with a sigh—"it's very difficult to look nice when you're not the same size for two months together."

Gran met her at the gate of Little Leadon and kissed her on both cheeks because it was her birthday and because—it was this that seemed to Raby so delightful and surprising—she was really glad to see the child.

There was everything for lunch that a hungry child would like best—roast duck and a wonderful pudding with macaroons and cream and apricot jam combined as only Mrs. Bannister knew how; and coffee in the garden afterwards.

Raby felt almost grown-up, for Gran didn't talk down to her, nor did she ask continual questions as is the irritating practice of some people when dealing with youth. Therefore it came about that it was Raby who asked the questions, and as they nearly all circled about Austin it seemed natural to tell Gran about the lending of Lucifer, her father's anger, and the tragedy of young Bates. And although Gran frankly sympathised with Mr. Verdon over Lucifer, she did it in such a way that Raby did not feel snubbed or chilled but did begin to see her father's side in the affair.

"Will you tell me when it's half-past three," she saked. "Biddy said I mustn't stay a minute after that, because you probably have things to do."

"I'm afraid it's that now," Gran said as she looked at her watch. "The time has passed so quickly—it was very good of you to come and cheer me up."

"If you really like me to come, I can come often," Raby said earnestly, "not to meals, you know, but at odd times. I like coming most awfully."

She did not linger over her farewells. Gran noted that with approval. When she said she had to go, she went.

On the way back along the stream she met Lil and Babs. They were effusive in their greetings and Raby felt guilty and uncomfortable when they suggested she should come for a walk in the Park with them there and then. In some subtle fashion Gran had made her feel it was bad form to ignore her father's wishes. He had allowed her to go to lunch

with Mrs. Underwood but she was convinced he would be very angry if—after what he had said—she went walking with Lil and Babs.

"I'm afraid I can't. I have to go straight home."

"We'll see you to the gate, then," Babs said, taking one arm affectionately while Lil seized the other. "We've been dying to get hold of you, for we want to know who that perfectly beautiful young man is that was riding with you. Is he stopping with you? You might introduce him to us."

Raby felt as though she were being stifled. They were so large and hot and redolent of some strong scent (it was chypre) that she instinctively hated.

"He's not staying with us, and he's gone," she

said.

"Well, but who is he? How did you get hold of him? He doesn't belong here: we know all the

young men here, by sight anyway."

The girls held her as in a vice, quickening their pace with hers. Babs bent forward and looked across her at Lil, exclaiming, "Well I never! And she so young and all! Isn't she a puss?" she asked jocularly, "so determined to keep her young man to herself. All right, my dear! We won't try to take him away from you. We've got plenty of our own, thank you, without poaching on yours—but you might tell us a bit about him. Does he make love nicely? How many times did he kiss you alone up there in the woods?"

Suddenly Raby hated Lil and Babs.

She was strong and she shook herself free of them very rudely indeed. "I don't know what you mean," she exclaimed furiously, "and I don't want to talk about him and I won't. Good-bye! I must go home."

started to run from them blindly, full of a she did not understand.

and Babs stood stock still on the path, looking ne indignant Raby, astonished and hurt at this nexpected repulse.

y had all been too busy talking to notice a man walking towards them. Now they saw ing Raby had stopped face to face with that in who had spoken to them the morning before Leadon Manor gate.

CHAPTER XII

VEREKER IS ROUSED

DURING luncheon Vereker found himself think about his daughter. After all, she was there, and might as well make the best of her. The fact t this friend of the Chesters seemed to like her gave a new importance: and good or bad, clever or stup plain or good-looking, she was his. And none of moralists who were so ready to criticise his way of could take her away from him. They'd like to, Chesters for instance, but they couldn't.

She wasn't kind or tender or dutiful, but he ow that he had done nothing to foster any such quali in Raby. She wasn't even fond of him. That rather regretted; but at times he had a curious po of turning upon himself the same cynical searchli with which he examined the motives of other peo and his present investigation led him to acknowle that he had never been particularly fond of Children were rather a bore. They had such about ing vitality and he was so tired. A growing a however, was not quite a child. A growing gir handsome as his Raby—quite unconsciously he the possessive pronoun—had possibilities. I might be proud of her. One might like, later on take her about. If—and it was a very big "if

one cared to go about oneself. Still, he was going away on Monday for a bit, he'd perhaps feel less rotten when he got up to London and met some amusing people. In the meantime he'd be a bit decent to the girl. He'd give her a present—it was her birthday—and have her to dine with him: and perhaps tomorrow he'd drive out with her to the Chesters. She always liked that, and it would please old Jim.

Quite thrilled by these novel, altruistic intentions, he found his keys and unlocked a drawer in his desk which contained the leather cases wherein were most of the trinkets he had given to Raby's mother. She had no jewellery of any value except what he had given her, and he had given her a good deal. Everything had prospered with him that year he had met her. He had been lucky racing. Investments had paid good dividends. Happiness had made him feel well. Perhaps, too, his unusual abstemiousness had helped.

He hadn't looked at the things for years, and as he opened the cases, and laid them one after another on his desk, he was amazed how many scenes in that brief year of happy marriage they brought before

him in panoramic clarity.

She had been fond of amethysts and he had given her a cross composed of fine stones set in small diamonds, and hung on a slender gold chain. Anne—there was a fine simplicity about her name that always seemed to him to express her—had loved it because it was a cross. She was religious. She believed all sorts of things that he knew were absurd and impossible, but her belief in them had not spoiled her, had not made her hard or officious or tiresome. "It's right and necessary for me," she always said with a quiet firmness he never sought to shake. In

106 RABY

fact he rather liked it in her. It was picturesque and it was something of a safeguard in a woman. Rab should have the cross. She might wear it on suc evenings as he sent for her to dine with him. She should wear it tonight.

If only Anne had lived, what a different fellow I might have been! He blamed most of his misso tunes and all his excesses on the death of Anne. I shut the cases and put them all back in the drawe yawned, and looked at the clock. He had give orders that Raby was to be sent to him directly sl came back.

Half-past three. Quite time she came away fro that woman. Youngsters never knew when to g His heart was soft with the thought of his wife. The altruistic mood continued. He'd go and fetch Rab meet her if she had already started. There we nothing else to do and it was a fine afternoon. I lit a cigar, took his hat and set forth.

His sight was good and no sooner had he cross the footbridge and turned on to the path by the streathan he beheld his daughter coming towards his accompanied, nay, more than accompanied—d gustingly entwined with those two detestable girls had forbidden her to speak to. And, what w worse, the moment she perceived him, so it appear to him, she shook them off and ran towards him.

Did she imagine he didn't recognise her?

Did she hope he hadn't seen her?

Was it possible that Mrs. Underwood had ask this riffraff to meet her?

And if not, how did Raby come to be with the again against his express command?

He hurried his steps.

Ah! she looked guilty. Her cheeks were scarle

And then he came face to face with her, and realised by her start of surprise that she had not seen him at all.

"Well, Raby," he remarked ironically, "you don't take a prolonged farewell of your friends."

She forgot how strongly he had objected to them and exclaimed rather breathlessly, "Babs said something I didn't like. That was why."

"May one ask what it was Babs said?"

"Oh, I couldn't tell you, Father."

"So bad as that, was it? Were these young ladies, who say such shocking things, also Mrs. Underwood's guests?"

"No, Father, they were coming along the stream just as I left and said they'd walk home with me."

"Have you entirely forgotten what I said to you last night?"

"I suppose I did. Shall we walk on, Father, else they'll be catching us up. I hadn't tried to meet them, and I could hardly tell them what you said—could I?"

"It didn't appear to me that you showed them much consideration in the way you left them."

Raby hung her head and looked foolish.

They crossed the bridge and walked in silence up the lane leading to the drive gate. Raby's cheeks cooled and now and then she stole a look at her father. Now he was dressed he looked better. Though she still considered him ugly he certainly was "awfully tidy." One noticed him. He was, as usual, very pale; but his expression was graver and less mocking than she had known it. She was sorry about the Pike girls. She didn't want to vex him today of all days, when it was her birthday and he had let her go to lunch with Mrs. Underwood. Besides, just at

that moment she felt that she never wished to Lil and Babs again. As if Austin were like on their common young men! They had gabble Raby about their young men, but most of the had gone over her head, for young men didn't into her.

As they reached the hall door Vereker turne her and said suddenly, "I acquit you of meeting t girls intentionally. But if they try to walk with arm in arm again you must tell them I won't hav Do you understand?"

"Won't that be very rude . . . and unkir

Raby asked dubiously.

"You had no hesitation in being both whe suited your mood. In the future you've got to mine, otherwise . . ." He paused ominously. you promise?"

Raby looked distressed. "I promise not to anywhere with them, but I can't promise not to s

to them if they speak to me."

"You can tell them your father won't allow I'm serious about this. Tell them your father doesn't wish you to associate with them and whave it. Now do you understand and do you not obey me?"

"I understand," she answered, "and I'll try. it's difficult when people have been nice to you you've been friendly together... to break off v

out any reason."

"You have the best of reasons for breaking this acquaintance—my wishes. And unless you break it off absolutely, I can never allow you to outside the grounds alone, and you wouldn't that."

Raby sighed again and made no comment.

"Come with me," he continued, "I've got something for you, but before I give it to you I've got something to say."

Very solemn she followed him into the library.

"Sit down," he said, and sank wearily into the chair in front of his desk. "Not there, you silly! Sit where I can see you."

She had sat down nervously on the edge of a chair near the door. Now she moved to one directly fac-

ing her father.

So much effort in one afternoon had worn out Vereker's scant garment of patience. The big child waiting there, watching him with those clear searching eyes suddenly became an unbearable nuisance. He simply couldn't talk any more to her now.

"As it's your birthday," he said wearily, "I'm giving you a pendant that belonged to your mother. You can wear it tonight when you dine with me, but you mustn't wear it at other times yet. You're too young. Now run away and for God's sake don't open it here."

He handed the case to her, and she, not knowing in the least what might be expected of her, took it with a casual "Thank you, Father," and left the room as quickly as she could.

Outside in the hall she opened it, and stood quite still. She made no attempt to lift out the cross. There it lay on the white velvet lining that had grown a little yellow in the long years. The pendant seemed something very rare and beautiful to Raby; and that her father, himself, had given it to her marked this birthday as something apart from all the others. He hadn't given it kindly or graciously, but he had given it himself. He had so seldom given her anything directly. Everything had come through Biddy or

110 RABY

Bates. When she was small she had had plenty o toys, not that she had ever cared much for toys except Wuffles, and he was nearly alive, he was so nice to cuddle. Raby liked things that were re sponsive. Horses understood what you said and answered. So did dogs, even puppies. Kitten were always ready to play. And the peaceful purring of the stable cat when it curled itself up on her knee was enough to restore tranquility even after the wors encounter with a governess.

Today she realised for the first time that inanimal things also may possess an atmosphere and a individuality. The stones in her cross were som thing the same colour as the pale violets embroiders on the sachet Gran had given her. Its clean, fair perfume had somehow made her think of mother Now, her father had given her this cross which make think of her own mother. He, too, must have thought of her mother to remember it.

She went upstairs to her room. Wuffles, ragge worn and disreputable, was sitting on her nightdre case, where she always insisted that he should s She showed her cross to Wuffles first. Wuffles mu see it even before Biddy.

Vereker and Raby had reached dessert and sl was eating crystallised fruit, delicately, with a for She would have liked an orange, but refrained. Of may do such terrible things with an orange. Sl wore the amethyst pendant, which on her, in h high-necked white frock, looked elderly and strang Moreover, Biddy had accentuated this appearant for having no ribbon to match the amethysts she hat ited Raby's hair back with a black one and had le her one of her own black silk scarves as a sash.

"Mauve and black's half-mourning," Biddy muttered to herself, "but it can't be helped: no other colour will go with those stones."

All through dinner which was rather silent, Vereker had watched his daughter, and she had watched him, covertly—but with a sort of fascinated expectation. She knew he had something to say to her and wondered what it could be.

When Jenkins left the room Vereker cleared his throat. "I suppose," he began, "you'd like to know why I object to your friendship with those... two girls. It's not because of their social position. I'm not a snob." He paused and looked expectantly at Raby.

"You don't really know them at all—do you, Father? You've hardly ever seen them even?"

"I've seen enough of them," he said grimly, "to show me that they are not at all the sort of girls I care to have you playing about with. If I said . . ." Here he narrowed his eyes and paused, wishing to heaven that his daughter would drop hers modestly, as the occasion demanded, instead of staring at him with unmistakable interest. "If I say," he continued, "that they are light . . . I suppose you don't know what I mean?"

"Oh, yes, I do. Like the governesses you used to . . ." Raby stopped, then continued: "the young ones who were sent off in a hurry."

"No, no," Vereker exclaimed, "don't take anybody's character away. Unsuitability is not necessarily lightmindedness—far from it."

"Can men be light-minded?"

"They generally are."

"But why is it all right for them and wrong for girls?"

"That, my dear Raby, is a subject that has never yet been thoroughly thrashed out. When you are a woman you can decide the rights and the wrongs of it for yourself. Till then I prefer that you should not consort with people I believe to be unsteady."

"Was Mother steady?"

"That's exactly what she was, though perhaps steadfast is a better word—and she was lovely and full of charm as well—that's why I want . . ." he hesitated, "to give you a chance."

"A chance? Of what?"

"A chance not to make a mess of things. You're a bit handicapped by having a father like me, you know."

"I suppose I am," she said thoughtfully.

He poured out some brandy and rolled it round in

the glass, filled it up and drank it.

"I'll tell you what you are," he said crossly. "You're damned cold and unnatural—and don't keep looking at me like that. Take your eyes off me. Has no one ever told you it's beastly bad manners to stare?"

She lowered her eyes obediently and regarded her plate while he noted with indignation the length and thickness of her eyelashes. A girl with eyelashes like that should be softer and more sympathetic. As though she read his thoughts she made a real effort. "I don't want to be cold and ungrateful, Father," she said humbly, still with lowered eyes, "but I don't seem to know what to say."

"That's what I complain of," he exclaimed plaintively. "You have no savoir faire. Your manners really are deplorable. When you speak to anyone you should look at him, not at the tablecloth. Surely there's a happy medium between glaring at

a fellow like the Ancient Mariner and not looking at him at all. However, I'd rather have you the girl you are than an ogling minx like either of those girls you were with this afternoon. Remember this, whatever sort of freedom a man may allow himself, he generally has a different standard for his daughter."

"But every girl must be somebody's daughter,"

the objected.

"It's as much as a man can do to look after his own daughter. 'Somebody's daughter' must take her chance. But that's not what I'm getting at. What I expect you to remember is this: I'll have no gallivanting, no larking either with girls or young men while you're still in the schoolroom. When you're grown up . . . then . . ."

"Then . . . what will happen?" she asked eagerly. Vereker gazed grimly at the empty glass in his

hand. "God knows," he said gloomily.

Impatience seized upon Raby. Intolerance of

this impotent autocracy that led to nothing.

"Then it seems to me," she exclaimed, "that, after all, it depends on a girl, herself, whether she's light or not."

Her father laid his glass on the table. "It's a rotten old world," he said wearily, "but you'll be saved a great many disillusions if you can only manage to be fastidious. And, remember, dignity is never ridiculous. Prudishness generally is."

"What's prudishness?"

"It usually consists in being shocked."

"Well, I'm not likely to grow up easily shocked, am I?"

Vereker laughed. "One to you. You're not all owl, Raby. There's a bit of the hawk about you,

too. Now before you bid me good night, listen to this"—and he quoted—

"'Had I so lavish of my presence been,
So common-hackney'd in the eyes of men,
So stale and cheap to vulgar company . . .'"

"Yes, Father, if you'd done all that, what would

have happened?"

"What has happened?" he retorted. "Why, unless you're more of a fool than I take you to be, you can see. Never make yourself stale and cheap to vulgar company. It's the very devil. I know... because it's what I've done."

He sat hunched up in his chair, his head fallen forward, his whole figure suddenly bent beneath an allenveloping fatigue.

Raby rose hastily, rather frightened, certain that she, at all events, had been too lavish of her company, to make him look so tired.

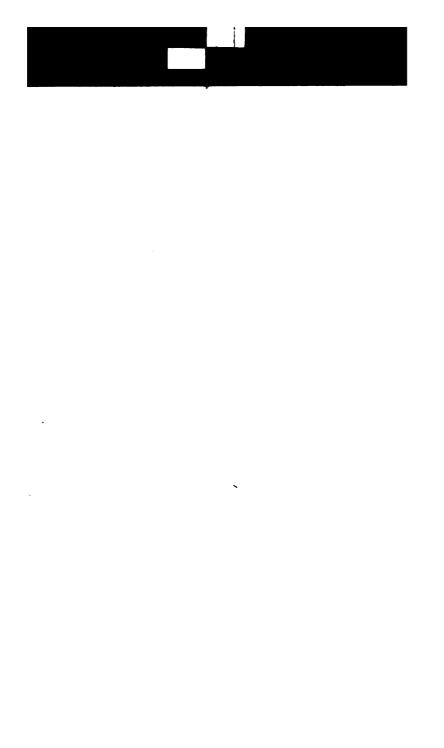
"Good-night, Father," she said nervously. "Thank

you for the lovely cross . . . and everything."

He took no notice of her, and at the door she turned and looked back into the room. The huddled figure in the chair had stretched out a hand and was pouring out more brandy.

Much relieved, she ran upstairs.

PART II THE LAST OF THE DYNASTY



CHAPTER XIII

MISS GRANSMORE

"SHE'S come," Raby announced, "and she's worse than I expected. How I shall bear her for a fortnight I can't think, but I promised father I would, so I suppose I must. She's unpacking now and I came to tell you."

Hatless and hot, Raby had arrived in the garden of Little Leadon, where Gran was sitting in the shade after tea.

"Sit down and tell me all about it," Gran said soothingly.

Raby sat down, crossed her long legs, and leaning back in the deck chair clasped her hands behind her head: "Father left this morning and she came this afternoon and she's a most annoysome woman." "Annoysome" was a favourite adjective of Biddy's.

"But how can you tell already?" Gran asked.

"Can't you tell, at once, whether people are tiresome or not? I can."

Gran smiled but made no remark and Raby blushed. "I know what you're thinking," she said, "you're remembering the first time I saw you; but, truly, I think even you'd find her tiresome."

"What is the lady's name?"

CHAPTER XIII

MISS GRANSMORE

"SHE's come," Raby announced, "and she's worse than I expected. How I shall bear her for a fortnight I can't think, but I promised father I would, so I suppose I must. She's unpacking now and I came to tell you."

Hatless and hot, Raby had arrived in the garden of Little Leadon, where Gran was sitting in the shade

after tea.

"Sit down and tell me all about it," Gran said soothingly.

Raby sat down, crossed her long legs, and leaning back in the deck chair clasped her hands behind her head: "Father left this morning and she came this afternoon and she's a most annoysome woman." "Annoysome" was a favourite adjective of Biddy's.

"But how can you tell already?" Gran asked.

"Can't you tell, at once, whether people are tiresome or not? I can."

Gran smiled but made no remark and Raby blushed. "I know what you're thinking," she said, "you're remembering the first time I saw you; but, truly, I think even you'd find her tiresome."

"What is the lady's name?"

120 THE LAST OF THE DYNASTY

for hers. I daresay you'll find her very kind . . ."
"And dreadfully silly," Raby retorted. "That's
what annoys me so, she's silly: and people of that
age ought not to be silly."

"People are silly at almost every age . . ."

"Well, I know this, "she'll infuriate father. She goes on saying just the sort of things he cannot bear,

all the time, and she's never quiet."

"Never quiet," Gran repeated. "Why, the poor lady has only just come. How can you tell that she's 'never' anything? She probably talked a lot to set you at your ease."

"Me, in my own house!"

"Well, she probably thought you felt shy with her."

"All right," said Raby, "you shall see her. I'll manage it somehow, then you'll know, and if, when you've seen her, you can tell me honestly that you like her, or admire her, or can feel the smallest respect for her..."

The last phrase struck Gran as curious—from Raby. "What do you mean by 'feel the smallest

respect'?" she interrupted.

"Well, what you do feel when you know people are decent, or very good at things, or really, truly dears like Mr. Chester or Bates. Why, I've more respect for father than that Gransmore woman; at least he's not a fool."

Gran felt that she ought to protest at this view of Mr. Verdon, but seeing that Raby was thoroughly ruffled she refrained and said pacifically: "Do wait a little before you make up your mind to dislike this lady. You can't judge of her yet. You know you are prejudiced just because she is your governess, and that's so unfair."

"No, it's not that, truly; she hardly said a word

about lessons. They don't seem to matter to her. It's the sort of way of her; she seems to think she's going to boss everything, run the house, order the meals, change the furniture. . . . My goodness, when father comes back! My hat! Give her mough rope and she'll hang herself jolly quick!"

"Wouldn't it be kinder to try and prevent her doing or saying things that would annoy your father

-kinder to him, I mean?"

"I never thought of that," Raby confessed frankly, "but I don't believe barbed wire or five-barred gates would stop her annoying father. The fact that she's she will be quite enough, but . . . you always make me want to do what you say—I suppose I must go back now. . . . Shall I run in tomorrow and tell you how we're getting on?"

Miss Gransmore had been at Leadon Hall a fortnight and it had been a very long fortnight for Raby. She continued to be fatuous, loquacious and cheerful 4 on her first arrival, and she was, in addition, inquisitive, interfering and persistently "bright." She was evidently and frankly disappointed that Vereker Verdon was not there. She was always referring to him in her conversations with Raby and just as, with Gran, Raby had been perfectly candid and open as to her father's peculiarities, so with Miss Gransmore was she reticent and reserved. She did impress upon her that he was not well, and that he was nervous and irritable and easily bored: but Miss Gransmore only smiled in the manner of one who is the repository of an agreeable secret and, with the oblique look that persons conversing with her found so baffling, remarked, "Ah! I expect he only wants to be taken the right way. Tact is what he wants. There's a sad lack of tact about most people. A tactful woman can do so much. A bright and pleasant manner is so cheering. I've always been told I'm like a sunbeam in the house. You'll see, Raby, my dear, between us we'll make Leadon Hall a different place for your poor father. I've heard a good deal about him from your aunts and I know. I understand and tout comprendre... Have you ever heard the French proverb?"

"I don't see how my aunts could tell you much about father," Raby said gloomily. "They haven't

seen any of us for years and years."

"Ah, but you don't always require to see people to know about them. Little birds carry news. We hear a great deal from little birds and the world is but a small place for those who have a large circle of friends. Living here so quietly, you have no idea how news travels where there is more va et vient. You don't know much French, I fear. Even if you can't speak it fluently a few of the more familiar phrases are so useful. They express things so neatly: I don't really know how I should get along without those dear sayings—so familiar that one might almost call them household words."

"I know what father would call them," Raby thought. But she did not say it aloud. As Miss Gransmore became more expansive, so she withdrew

into a shell of almost impenetrable reserve.

"Your niece," Miss Gransmore wrote to her friend, Raby's aunt Emily, "is rather a puzzle. She says very little and is not in the least demonstrative or affectionate. I should say the poor child has been much neglected and left to servants. She is quite biddable but seems to me rather heavy and dull, and

et sometimes I hear her chattering nineteen to the wzen to her old nurse or the men about the stable. The house is most lugsurious and the servants efficent and quite polite and the food is all that the greatest epicure could desire, but the solitude, my dear Emily, weighs heavily on one accustomed as I am to the 'feast of reason and flow of the soul' that occurs where kindred spirits are gathered together. I feel sure that when your brother-in-law returns things will be different. We shall meet on common ground in our desire to brighten and better that dear child. Over lessons she is not at all stupid. learns what I set her quite quickly and though, of course, as yet I don't give her long hours or arduous tasks I don't think lessons will ever prove a bone of contention between us. Where she fails is in the little things that make or mar the womanly woman. She is so abrupt and she seems at times almost eager to get away from me, which I cannot understand. She tells me hardly anything about herself though I have given her every sort of encouragement and even set her an example by telling her all sorts of interesting things about myself. If she would ask me questions it would be easier, even if they were indiscreet, but she never asks me anything. You wanted to know how she was dressed. Well, she has plenty of clothes all very good and I should say expensive though very simple. Nothing is spared in any way and the house seems to run on oiled wheels all by itself, for I can't find out who really manages things, unless it is the old nurse Biddy. I've offered to help in lots of little ways, such as doing the flowers, ordering things from the tradespeople in the town or consulting with the cook about the menu—but without being actually rude (I can't say they are that), they

just brush me aside. Apropos of the flowers, Biddy mentioned that Mr. Verdon doesn't like many flowers in the house and never uses the drawing-room. I said I'd like to use it—it's a very fine room—she said, Master had given no orders to that effect and that the schoolroom was for Miss Raby and me. All the same I ordered tea in the drawing-room that afternoon. You can understand I don't intend to be put upon by those servants. It's a very large house with quantities of bedrooms all very nicely furnished. Mine is a fine room with dressing-room attached. It seems such a pity such a house is not filled with a house-party of agreeable people. Perhaps I shall be able to persuade your brother-in-law to launch out & little socially. It makes such a difference when there is a lady at the head of affairs. I have no fear but what I shall get on all right with him. I feel that I shall be able to settle down here very comfortably in spite of the quiet and it is certainly a healthy place. Raby is a big strong girl. She disappears for hours at a time, and then I generally find she has been riding. I wish my health would have permitted me to indulge in horse exercise, but I feel it is safer not."

Miss Gransmore's method of teaching was simple. It entailed the minimum amount of effort on the part of the teacher, and the maximum on the part of the pupil. The pupil "learned" a lesson selected by Miss Gransmore in one of the many school books that Raby had accumulated during her varied and subversive experience of governesses: and Miss Gransmore asked questions upon it, her eyes glued to the printed page. It was impossible to teach arithmetic in this fashion so Miss Gransmore left that subject alone. "I'm too feminine," she said archly, "to be

really good at mathematics, and after all, so long as a woman knows her pence table and can check an account if it's wrongly added up, what more does she want? Especially anyone in our position, Raby dear."

But Raby, perversely, was fond of sums. She had learnt to like doing them with the only capable governess she had ever had; one who stayed three months while her father was in the South of France, and only three days after his return. She was young and pretty and clever and Raby always regretted her.

Under Miss Gransmore lessons lasted from 9.30 till 12. Then Raby changed for her ride and rode for an hour. They lunched at half-past one and after lunch Miss Gransmore retired to her room "for a rest." At half-past three she accompanied Raby for a walk and at six they did lessons for another hour. That is, Miss Gransmore asked questions—if possible the questions often found tabulated at the end of educational manuals—and set small quantities of preparation for the morrow. Raby was supposed to "do preparation" between 2.30 and 3.30, but as a rule she fled to Little Leadon, to play with Tim and Nancy, who were staying with Gran.

Nancy was five, a thin, anxious-looking little girl; sensitive, eager, dark-eyed and timid; quite unlike either father or mother. Even Cicely acknowledged that Nancy was "highly-strung." Tragedies were so frequent in Nancy's small world. So many things were terrifying. Misunderstandings were so painfully possible. She was so anxious to please, so eager to shine, and so hopelessly handicapped by a desperate sort of diffidence that heavily extinguished any glimmer of light or leading that she might show. Poor quaint little loving Nancy!

126 THE LAST OF THE DYNASTY

And then there was Tim.

It would have been difficult, even for a brilli little elder sister, to be much of a star in the delici comedy that life became whenever Tim came on scene. Tim was three and a half, small and chul indescribably quick in his movements, and mind was as active as his body. All day long asked questions and made comments in a clear h little voice. He was the most friendly and fear soul alive, and to see anyone doing anything fi mowing lawns to driving a motor—was to rous Tim a passionate desire to assist and to practise said art, craft or amusement for himself. He lc his grandmother with whole-hearted intensity, only because she was kind and adoring, but because she was more willing and able to answer quest than anybody else he knew. His heart was capac and elastic. Bannister and Mrs. Bannister v already enthroned there and in consequence (it the inevitable consequence of any sort of associa with Tim at that time) his slaves. Raby also pro acceptable, for she was good at carrying people her back, and did she not appear sometimes on a and "very f'isky" horse? She could not be suaded to take Tim up in front of her when she i that horse, but one day she came on another, e taller; and on this one she did take Tim, letting hold the reins behind her hand and she trotted v him quite a long way down the road, bringing back bumped breathless and beatific to his admifamily assembled at Little Leadon gate. Moreo on this dignified and amiable animal (it was Lucit Tim was allowed to ride by himself, holding the r while Bannister clung firmly to one of his legs Raby led them right round Leadon garden on paths. Oh, those were great days!

She felt that even Miss Gransmore became more bearable if Tim and Nancy were sandwiched between her ineptitudes. Raby had had a great deal to do with the young of various animals, but children were a new delight. She was gentle and strong and Tim and Nancy bullied her thoroughly.

Gran had called on Miss Gransmore during her first week at Leadon Hall, and Miss Gransmore had returned it. Had Raby not been so entirely taken over by Tim and Nancy when she came to Little Leadon it might have struck her that Gran maintained a discreet silence on the subject of Miss Gransmore.

Cicely had expressed a desire that on Sunday afternoon Gran should take Tim and Nancy to the Children's Service. It was to be Tim's initiatory experience of church-going. "I don't know what he'll do," Cicely wrote, "but it's better he should do it in a church where he isn't known. He's got to begin some time. Nancy went when she was three and has always been perfectly good, but Tim . . . you know, Mother darling, what Tim is, and I know you won't mind nearly as much as I should."

Gran thought that Tim being Tim, it might have been well to defer his public devotions a little longer: but Cicely's wishes with regard to the children were, of course, paramount. Nanny had friends in Casterly and was to be off duty on Sunday afternoon, so Gran asked Raby to help her take the children to church.

Tim was excited and pleased. Nanny and his sister had both impressed upon him that he was going to God's house and must be very good and absolutely quiet. Tim looked solemn for a second, nodded, and then smiled happily to himself. He'd been told all that before lots of times, but people always liked to

hear him talk and he wasn't going to believe that God, to Whom he addressed dictated messages morning and evening, would be less appreciative than the rest of his friendly little world.

"What s'all us do in church?" he asked Raby, as she wheeled him in the mail-cart along the Roman road. "What s'all us play at? Will there be tea?"

"Not till you come home, and you don't play. We listen and stand up and sit down, and kneel and say prayers, and sing hymns."

"You an' me?"

"Yes; if we know the tune."

"An' Nancy an' Gran?"

"Everybody does it together."

"Ven it is a pahty."

"Well—not exactly—you'll soon see, Tim."
"Sit down, get up, sit down, get up," Tim chanted, bobbing up and down in the mail-cart, "an' God'll be there, I suppose, to asceive us?"

"I suppose so," she assented dubiously, wishing that Gran and Nancy walked faster. She didn't feel at all competent to prepare Tim's infant mind for what was before him, as she had very seldom been to a children's service herself.

When they got into church Gran selected a seat modestly far back. Tim was between Raby and his grandmother and Nancy on her other side. When they all knelt down Gran's face was buried in her hands, so he pulled at Raby demanding in a penetrating whisper "Where's God? Isn't He in?"

Fortunately for Raby at this moment the choir started in procession from the vestry singing a hymn, and Tim was so excited and interested that he failed to insist on an answer. He tried to climb up on the seat so that he might lose nothing of what was going on, but this wasn't allowed. Gran and Raby surrendered their hassocks and on these placed upon his own he stood somewhat unsteadily while they each grabbed him by a portion of his diminutive white coat.

There happened to be a large number of children present, a contingent of "Brownies" and "Wolf Cubs." A young scout-master about nineteen, sitting just across the aisle from Tim, had a loud and raucous voice. In the first hymn he dominated choir and congregation alike. One verse he sang in a tremendous throaty baritone and the next in a piercing falsetto. Twice during this hymn did Tim nearly fall off the hassocks, in spite of Gran and Raby, in his endeavour to discover who it was made this varied and surprising noise. Tim's small astonished face and the bayings and bellowings across the aisle were too much for Raby and she shook with silent laughter, as Tim speedily discovered.

"Raby laughin'," he announced cheerfully, and

began to laugh himself.

Gran flushed and nervous, turned to look reprovingly at Raby, when Nancy pulled at her violently, and she looked down to see that the poor child was on the verge of tears: "It's so loud and dreadful," she moaned, "stop him."

And at that moment Tim located the origin of

these surprising sounds.

"Is that God singing so loud?" he asked Raby. She shook her head violently and buried her face in her handkerchief. Just then the hymn stopped and a small clear voice asked, "Where is He then?"

During prayers and catechising Tim was very attentive though far from still. Children in various parts of the church answered questions and whenever a child did so he stood on the hassocks to discover which child it was.

But the hymns were a severe trial both to Raby

and Gran. The scout-master nearly lifted the roof off each time. Nancy clung to her grandmother so violently that she had no attention to spare for Tim, and Tim plunged on the hassocks and sang "Three Blind Mice" at the top of his voice to see if he could drown the scout-master.

At last came "O Happy Band of Pilgrims"; Tim fell off the hassocks for the last time and the service was over.

It had only lasted an hour and he was fresh as paint, so he was allowed to walk for a bit while Nancy, who looked white and exhausted, rode in the mail-cart.

"I s'pose," he said thoughtfully as, holding he hand, he trotted beside his grandmother, "I s'pos He couldn't give tea to such a lot of children." The plaintively, "He didn't take any notice of me."

"Who didn't?" Gran asked, feeling supremel

thankful to be out in the street again.

"I didn't somehow 'spect Him to look like that, Tim continued rather sadly, "did you?"

"Do you mean the clergyman?" Gran asked.

"Wasn't he God?" Tim cried in an astonishe voice, "wot asked all the little boys and girls tho questions?"

"That," said Gran, ignoring the first part of Tim's inquiry, "was the curate. Your Daddy hone, you know."

"Then He wasn't there at all?" Tim persisted.

"If you mean God," Gran said desperately, "I is everywhere—but it's very difficult to understandor explain."

It was no use fencing with Tim.

"D'you understand Gran?"

"To a certain extent, yes; but it has taken me

long time. You ask Daddy to explain it all to you when you get home."

"I wis' I'd seen Him. Has Raby?"

"They'll be home long before we are if we don't hurry," Gran said diplomatically, and in the joy of running to overtake Raby and Nancy, Tim, for a while, forgot his perplexities.

But he touched upon them again to Bannister in the garden after tea. Bannister was watering boxes of seedlings and of course Tim insisted upon helping.

"So you went to church, sir?" said Bannister

appropriately. "Was you pleased?"

"I goed," Tim said proudly, "for the whole afternoon, but God wasn't there. At least, I never seen Him."

"No, sir; I don't suppose you did."

"Why?" asked Tim.

"You must ask your papa questions the like of that, Master Tim," Bannister said firmly. "You water them pots . . . gently: and then you come with me and I'll show you a fish."

That night when Tim, looking adorable in the minutest of pale blue pyjamas, knelt at Gran's knee giving the usual dictated messages to God, which he called: "Now-I'll-'ay-me," he added a clause of his own: "Sorry I didn't see You 'safternoon. I hope I s'all some day."

Gran gathered the little blue figure into her arms: "You will, my precious; I know you will," she whispered, as she hugged him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOMECOMING

Miss Gransmore had been at Leadon Hall nearly three weeks when, at lunch time, a telegram came for Jenkins from Vereker, announcing his return that evening. She was plainly delighted and took it for granted that she and Raby would dine with him—to "welcome him home." Raby suggested that they had better wait to find out whether her father wanted them, but Miss Gransmore smiled her secret, superior smile, remarking "In matters that require savoir faire, my dear, you must allow me to know what's what. As a woman of the world I feel that it would be remiss in you and I not to dine with your father on the evening of his homecoming. It might look as though we were not glad to have him back."

Raby was not at all sure that she was glad to have him back. So long as her governess did not interfere much with her, she was beginning to tolerate her presence in the house. She was seldom cross. If she knew of Raby's constant visits to Little Leadon she made no objection. She did a great deal of sewing for herself and that kept her occupied, and she was trying to teach Raby to make a cotton blouse. She talked continually, nearly always about herself and her travels, and she didn't expect much in the way of answers. Therefore Raby was coming

to the conclusion that, all things considered, she was more bearable than some of them.

But would her father bear with Miss Gransmore even for a few minutes at a time?

Raby had reason to believe all things of her father's impatience, and she knew his intolerance of elderly uncomeliness. Miss Gransmore was not graceful. Her face was hard-featured and crudely coloured and her really good and abundant hair was spoiled by the way she dressed it. And even as she was unconscious of any defects either in her character or appearance, wo was she self-conscious to a degree in her belief in the irresistible charm of both.

Raby was growing mentally as well as physically. She no longer took her father for granted as in the past. Things he said echoed and re-echoed in her mind, and she had an uncomfortably clear recollection of his appearance as he sat huddled forward in his chair, at dinner on the evening of her birthday. Intercourse with Gran had roused in her a sense of responsibility. She dimly felt that, somehow, she ought to act as a buffer between Miss Gransmore and Vereker's petulant irritation; but was quite incapable of devising any method of doing so. She could only hope that a message would be sent to the schoolroom that he would dine alone that first evening.

Greatly to her relief Miss Gransmore did not suggest trying to see him immediately he arrived. All her life Raby had waited to be sent for. Except on that last birthday morning when she had gone into his bedroom to ask permission to lunch with Gran, she could not remember, voluntarily, trying to see him.

The train was late and it was after six when she heard the motor coming up the drive. Apparently,

Miss Gransmore also heard his arrival, for she abruptly concluded the geography lesson she was "hearing," and departed to her own room to dress. But looking out of the window a few minutes later Raby saw her gathering some sprays from a Dorothy Perkins rambler which had just come into bloom.

Vereker was always chilly at night and a log fire was burning in the hall by dinner time. He was standing on the hearthrug with his back to it warming his coat tails when his daughter and her governess appeared from opposite sides of the landing, under the big window that lit the flight of stairs leading to the hall.

As she caught sight of Miss Gransmore Raby gasped, for that lady was (she would have described it so) en grande tenue. She wore a low black gown covered with black sequins and the exigencies of her figure, as described by Raby, made it seem very low indeed. The really startling thing, however, was that she had woven the Dorothy Perkins into a wreath for her hair, it was set rakishly askew, and a bunch adorned her corsage.

Vereker stared for a moment, then gave an extraordinary sort of crow which ended in a yell of laughter. Raby, startled, for she had hardly ever heard her father laugh, lost all desire to laugh herself, flashed past Miss Gransmore down the stairs, seized Vereker by the arm and led him into the study, shutting the door behind them. Her knees were shaking and she felt that something dreadful and inexplicable had happened. It was like a street boy to laugh like that! Vereker sank on the nearest chair and ceased to laugh the instant the closing of the door blotted out the vision on the stairs. He caught at Raby's hand and pulled her close to him. ou see it, too?" he asked. "There was a beold May Queen on the stairs? It was real?
it?... tell me... you did see it?"
course I saw Miss Gransmore," Raby
i impatiently. "She was all dressed up and
s but that was no reason to go on like that.
ade you do it, Father? It was dreadful."
nerves," Vereker moaned, "my nerves. I
rol of myself. She was so ludicrous...
thankful she was real. Sometimes, Raby, I
s that I know are not real... yet I see
.. and it's horrible!" He paused, drawreath in sobbing gasps.

he was speaking he kept running his shaky and down her arm as though there was comhe contact. "Don't leave me, Raby. Tell I'd better do. . . I'll try to pull myself . . . now I know she's real. . . . We'll d tell her any lie . . . say I'd read some-using and just thought of it. People often don't they? For God's sake don't stand ring as if there was nothing to be done. ay something! Why the devil shouldn't I I was amused?"

rou think we'd better have dinner with you sets you so?" Raby asked. She wished her ouldn't hold her so tightly. She hated the his hot nervous hand, as he ran it up and arm. She wanted to shake herself free and man who spoke in jerky, breathless phrases had been running. Yet something held her lace beside him more firmly than his hot s hands. She was upset and bewildered er frightened. This that had happened was id wholly unexpected, but she had got to see

him through it. She must be "steadfast" like her mother. She was not quite sure what it meant, but the word had remained in her mind with a curious attraction. Suddenly, like a lamp shining at the end of a dark passage she recollected Miss Gransmore's invincible faith in her own attractions. That was steadfast, anyhow, and she'd never believe anyone could laugh at her.

"Father, I'll tell her anything you can think of," she said soothingly. "She was awfully anxious to see you, and I expect she made herself so grand because you were coming. She's never done it

before."

He leant his head against her firm, young arm and groaned: "She must be mad, she must be mad."

"She's certainly very sillly," Raby agreed, "but you got her, you know. Hadn't I better say you'd

rather we didn't dine downstairs tonight?"

"No, no—I'll come. Send Jenkins in to me and I'll come in a few minutes. Tell any lie, and mind you back me up at dinner and don't, for heaven's sake, do the Ancient Mariner stunt."

Jenkins was waiting outside the study door and looked less pontifical than usual. The drawing-room door stood wide open and Miss Gransmore was seated in full view right in the centre of a large chesterfield, with her back to the setting sun.

The wreath was rather more askew, and it was plain to the least intuitive beholder that she was en-

veloped in an atmosphere of dudgeon.

"Why did you whisk your father away like that, Raby?" she inquired querulously. "It wasn't at all polite to push past me on the stairs and ignore me like that."

"Father asked me to tell you," Raby answered with

r usual directness, "that he had just thought of a nny story and that's why he laughed out loud."

"Quite natural, quite natural," Miss Gransmore greed, "I've a strong sense of humour myself, and I think of anything amusing I simply must laugh, ut that was no reason for not introducing me as you ught to have done."

"He'll be here in a minute," Raby faltered, feelig that at any moment she might imitate her father's udeness, for Miss Gransmore looked more like a wrkey than ever as she bridled and swallowed, sitting state there on the sofa. From where she stood laby saw Jenkins carry a small tray with a glass on into the study, and almost directly afterwards her ather crossed the hall and had shaken hands with

diss Gransmore, offered her his arm, and escorted

er to dinner.

During the meal she was gay and archly reproving, she besprinkled her converse with French brases and amazed her host by her constant use of I" after a preposition. "People like that are quite ifferent to Raby and I" came in more than once. ereker behaved with great restraint, but he looked hastly and little beads of perspiration stood on his prehead. In the middle of dinner Raby noticed that is hands were dirty. He had evidently forgotten wash them when he changed.

His clothes were immaculate as usual, but his unds!

Her father's hands dirty!

Again she felt that inexplicable consternation that id assailed her when she heard his shout of laughter. is hands fascinated her. She wanted not to see em and kept looking. Hands grimed with a day London. Dirty, unkempt nails. She dared not

look at Miss Gransmore, for the wreath, the plump shoulders and extensive bust made her want to laugh hysterically. She dared not meet her father's eyes because she knew he'd say she was staring like the Ancient Mariner, and she had no idea what he meant. And if she didn't look like that, he'd say she was an owl, and she was quite familiar with the appearance of owls. So she either stared out of the window or modestly regarded her plate. Happily Miss Gransmore talked so incessantly and was so persistently "bright" that neither Raby nor her father needed to do more than respond occasionally.

It seemed a very long dinner to Raby, but at last it was over and Miss Gransmore sailed across the hall to the drawing-room instead of going up to the school-room, as usual, and there Raby left her.

For three-quarters of an hour Miss Gransmore sat waiting: but the dining-room door remained shut. Her host made no attempt to join her and she, too, went up to bed.

Three o'clock in the morning and Vereker could not sleep. Brilliant moonlight. A strong smell of honeysuckle, trees rustling and whispering outside; and within a dark, dreadful stillness. He got up, pulled up the blind, put on his dressing-gown and walked about the room. He had drunk a good deal of port after dinner but he had taken no drug, for his own outburst that evening had frightened him. He had never before so completely lost control of himself before a stranger. And the restraint he had had to exercise during dinner had completely exhausted him.

Now, he felt extraordinarily lonely in the silent house. Lonely and fearful of he knew not what. Suddenly he realised that he wanted Raby.

How strong she was. How fresh and fragrant and young! For once her silence and diffidence during dinner had not annoyed him. It was a relief, a contrast to that ridiculous, ungrammatical old bore his sister-in-law had sent him. He could'nt stand her in the house: that was certain. She'd have to go—and at once.

Yes; he wanted Raby. If he could see her she would quiet his nerves. She'd done it that night already. Again he seemed to feel the firm rounded young arm, so warm, so comforting... surely there was nothing to prevent him going to have a look at his own daughter if he wanted to. He accedn't wake her ... but was he quite sure of her room? Yes; she was in the school-room wing: at the end of the passage: Biddy had once bothered him with something about a spouting that leaked and made a damp place on the wall.

He lit a candle and went quietly across the landing. When he reached Raby's door he turned the handle softly and opened it. A strong draught met him and blew out the candle, but the room was quite light, for, as usual, the windows were unshrouded and wide open.

Raby lay on her side, her cheek pillowed on one hand. Her other arm, outside the bedclothes, and hare where the loose sleeve of her nightdress had slipped up, was loosely clasping Wuffles. Her body made a long, straight mound; and in the strong silvery light her face looked pale and gently austere: and the room, devoid of colour, a study in soft translucent greys and whites.

He lifted a wicker seated chair and sat down beside the bed. The room struck chill and he shivered. How still she lay. How sound asleep. A thick

plait of hair tied at the end with narrow white tape lay along her shoulder. The wind had risen, the beeches outside swayed and rustled. He shivered and instinctively drew nearer to the quiet figure on the bed, laying his hand very lightly on her bare arm, the strong, warm, young arm he had longed to touch again.

Raby opened her eyes.

She was puzzled but not in the least frightened. Night had never held any terrors for Raby. Instantly her mind jumped to the horses. Serena's foal was due, and she knew Bates was anxious—something had gone wrong and her father was vexed—

For a second or two she lay looking at her father, then raised herself on her elbow: "Is it Serena?"

she asked. "Is she very bad?"

Instinctively Vereker's hand had closed on her arm. This was the daughter he wanted, warm, vibrant with life: strong: with hair that smelt of

violets; and wide, wondering eyes.

"I couldn't sleep," he muttered shamefacedly, "se I came to look at you. I wanted somebody." Ever jangled nerve in him called to her wholesomeness for soothing. That she could sleep so soundly when he was wakeful and miserable suddenly seemed extra ordinarily heartless and unfilial on her part.

"What would you like me to do?" she asked sleepily, opening her mouth wide in a large healthy

yawn.

"Wake up for one thing," he answered tartly, "and attend to me."

"Would you like me to get up?" Raby asked, feel ing that the complications of life were really getting beyond her if she was expected to keep awake in the middle of the night.

"No, no," Vereker whispered impatiently. "Lie wn again. I only want to feel somebody is near. I'm nervous. Can't you understand? I'm only vous."

Again he shivered.

she sat up in bed and put Wuffles carefully on the ow. "If you'll go back to bed," she said, "I'll ie and sit by you and then perhaps you'd sleep. ne on."

he swung her long legs out of bed and put on her ssing-gown.

'Could you sleep on the sofa?" he asked eagerly. I can sleep anywhere," said Raby.

But it wasn't true. For the first time in her life lay wide awake on the sofa in her father's room, ile at intervals he asked her if she were asleep. At last they both heard the servants stirring in the use and he sent her back to her own room.

CHAPTER XV

TENSION

Miss Gransmore was puzzled and annoyed. Three days had passed and she had never so much as seen her employer again. She was no longer quite \$0 sure that tact alone was needful to establish cordia relations between them. The subtlest tact, unac companied by opportunity to display it, is rather lik ringing up an uninhabited house on the telephone and she was suffering from the irritation that we a feel when reiterated exclamations of "Hullo" receiv no response. Convinced that she must have made a excellent impression upon Vereker during that fir evening, she was still eager to shower sympathy ar comprehension upon him; but, what she called he amour propre was wounded to the point of huffine by the fact that she and her pupil had been rigorous relegated to the schoolroom ever since his retur They didn't even go down to luncheon, and this sl regarded as a "slight." The weather, too, was w and chilly and even Miss Gransmore was conscio of an inexplicable sense of tension in the air.

For one thing her pupil was, as she put it, "ve trying." Languid and inattentive during her lessor. Raby answered rudely when called to order. SI had, too, seen a great deal more of Miss Gransmo than during her father's absence, for that lady, her determination to lose no opportunity of meetir

Vereker, had on the previous days even foregone her usual afternoon sleep and was full of exasperating enquiries as to Raby's plans for the afternoon and conduct generally.

Today, however, was so dreadfully wet that she had gone to lie down as usual directly after lunch.

Raby never stayed indoors because it happened to be wet and that afternoon had deliberately disobeyed her governess by going for a ride in the Park by her-

self in the pouring rain.

Miss Gransmore's rest was somewhat curtailed by the fact that the aroma of an excellent cigar was wasted throughout the house. She got up at once, did her hair very carefully, powdered her nose, and, seeking adventure, left her room to sidget up and down the front staircase and about the hall. She looked into the always empty drawing-room, and smally sought Raby in Biddy's sanctum, the house-keeper's room, for she was simply dying to talk to somebody.

It was a dark and gloomy afternoon, and Biddy was seated in the window seat to get as much light as possible while she darned a pair of Raby's silk stockings. She looked surprised to see Miss Gransmore, but rose politely when she entered.

"I came to see if Miss Verdon was here. Do you know where she is?"

"She went out ridin', mum, about half an hour ago," Biddy answered in her usual voiceless whisper.

"Riding! On such an afternoon! I wonder you didn't stop her, or at least consult me before letting her go. Look at the rain!"

"Miss Raby's never been used to take notice of weather, mum," Biddy murmured, adding as an afterthought, "Ladies that hunts don't."

"Whether Miss Raby takes notice of weather or not she must take notice of what I say," Miss Gransmore retorted. "Why didn't you come and ask my permission before allowing her to go out in such weather?"

"Miss Raby's always said you was laying down the first part of the afternoon," Biddy explained patiently, "and it wouldn't be no sort of use, miss, we couldn't stop her. When she's in the mood, ride she will. She's bin, so to speak, brought up to it an' it's become an' 'abit."

"Habits, if they are bad, have to be broken," Miss Gransmore said, loftily. "Please send Miss Raby to me immediately she comes in."

On the landing the smell of a cigar was verstrong. Down the front stairs again went Mis Gransmore. A fierce draught met her, for the inne door of the hall was open. The outer door stoo wide and silhouetted against a square of rain-battere landscape was Vereker Verdon's back.

Miss Gransmore shuddered at the draught, patte her hair with both hands and advanced into the oute hall to join him.

The rain and the wind were making such a nois that he did not realise her approach till a voice, clos to his ear, said, "Good afternoon. Quite dreadfi weather, isn't it, Mr. Verdon?"

Starting violently, he turned to her and ejaculated "Filthy," and without further greeting turned h back on her and gazed down the drive.

Miss Gransmore was piqued. She moved into lir with him and cleared her throat. "Mr. Verdon, cayou give me your attention for a few minutes? I wis to speak to you about Raby."

"By the way, why isn't Raby with you-or yo

r, which is more to the point?" he asked, still looking at her.

it's just what I want to talk to you about . . . my authority—my expressed wish . . . "

can't talk here," he interrupted. "There's infernal draught."

hut the outer door with a bang, passed her, it back into the hall.

followed, bridling. "Not here," she exbreathlessly, "this is too public a place and have to say is of a private nature."

ghed so deeply that it suggested a groan and i her into the drawing-room, but he did not door.

Gransmore advanced to the sofa and sat pon it. "Let us be comfortable," she said, patting the seat invitingly. He stood where frowning like a sulky boy, his eyes bent on the his shoulders hunched, his half-smoked cigar ween his teeth, and he said nothing what-

le frightened, she took up the tale. "I hope will support my authority with Raby. Durlast few days she has been so difficult—quite to what she was before. I can't seem to do; with her."

other night at dinner," he growled, "you you and she were like sisters."

ve were, Mr. Verdon, but the very next day to notice a change. She was distrait and ve; and it has gone on every day the same; terday afternoon after tea she actually fell while I was talking to her—such an extrathing to do after tea!"

ertainly was a reflection on the interest of

your remarks, Miss Gransmore, but I can't see that there was anything very reprehensible in that. Don't come and worry me about trifles—I can't stand it. Either you can manage the child or you can't: and if you can't the remedy is in your own hands. At any rate, it is in mine."

"This afternoon," she persisted, ignoring the implication in his last remark, "she has gone out riding in all this rain contrary to my wishes: contrary, indeed, to my commands, and when I spoke to Biddy all she said was 'nobody can stop her.' If nobody can stop her, what possible authority have I?"

"None, I fear," Vereker answered, suddenly

"None, I fear," Vereker answered, suddenly raising his eyes and fixing them on Miss Gransmore's flushed face with a glare that frightened her. "And that leads me to the conclusion that you are probably unfitted for the position you occupy, and the sooner you give it up the better for all of us."

She rose hastily. "Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Verdon," she pleaded, "I assure you I am not complaining. I only ask that you will support me with Raby. If you tell her she must pay attention to what I say I'm sure she will, and everything will be as pleasant as possible. As it was, in fact, until this last few days."

"Do you imply," he asked, in a voice like a snarl, "that my return has anything to do with Raby's sudden fall from grace?"

He was watching her closely.

"Please don't misunderstand me, Mr. Verdon. Of course I imply nothing of the kind. I only wish Raby and I might see more of you. . . . It must be dull for you to be so much alone. . . . Wouldn't you like me to play draughts with you sometimes, or halma?—on a wet afternoon like this, for instance

..." She faltered suddenly, for the expression on Vereker's face was so unpleasant, so black and forbidding, that even Miss Gransmore's self-confidence suffered a temporary eclipse.

"I detest games of every description," he growled. "And now may I suggest that you return to your own part of the house to wait for my

daughter."

For the last three nights Vereker had roused Raby in the small hours because he had learnt that her near presence could steady his quivering nerves. Consequently she had lost quite a third of her usually sound and dreamless sleep. Her head ached, and her eyelids felt as though they were weighted. Each night she had gone back with him to his room, to lie on the sofa at the foot of his bed. To lie there, but not to sleep, for he needed constant reassurance that the was actually there. The second and third nights Biddy had heard them and each following morning had remonstrated with Raby, declaring she must have sleep in the afternoon to make up for her broken rest. In a way Biddy was rather uplifted that Vereker should want his daughter. It was right in Biddy's eyes that a daughter should minister to her father if he was ill . . . but she ought to make up for lost rest, in the day, when he didn't want her. But for Raby to have a sleep after lunch, in view of Miss Gransmore's new activity, required some sort of explanation, and Raby felt she simply could not tell Miss Gransmore anything about her father. She didn't understand what was the matter with him herself, but she was sure it was something queer and discreditable and abnormal; and she felt she ought to shield him from the curiosity of Miss Gransmore.

She was also shielding Miss Gransmore from the insensate hatred of her father, which he had expressed with his usual lurid emphasis during the night watches.

She had not seen Gran for four days, but the last time she did see her Gran had suggested, apropos of some scornful comments on Raby's part, that perhaps Miss Gransmore was rather pathetic: "It's a hard world," she said, "for elderly unattractive women who are not very wise or well-off. I sometimes think if generous young people realised this they would be a little kinder."

"But I know Father will send her packing when

he comes back."

"And isn't that humiliating? I think myself that it is inevitable—from what you tell me—but it would be kinder if you could get that poor lady to go of her own accord."

It was this suggestion that really was at the root of Raby's sudden insubordination. "If I'm rude and nasty myself perhaps she'll go without a rumpus with Then she'll never know what he's really like," Raby had reflected, and promptly acted upon this inspiration. It was an easy policy to pursue, for owing to lack of sleep her own nerves were tense and irritable and she was quite unusually cross and contradictory. Today she had felt that if she didn't get away from Miss Gransmore for an hour or two she would fly at that much tried lady and beat her. So when her governess went for her usual rest, Raby changed quickly and went to the stables to saddle Romance herself if no one happened to be there. She was not supposed to ride alone, but she often did. Bates was about and he made no difficulties. In fact, he speeded her on her way, sympathetically remarking that "a bit of 'acking's not to be despised when 'untin's over."

Far in the green heart of Leadon Park Raby was walking Romance along a glade so deeply shaded by tall beeches that, in spite of the heavy rain, the ground was almost dry. Here a great peace brooded and all the sounds were soothing. The patter of rain on young leaves, like the ghosts of little children's feet. The soft "cloop" of hoofs, the swish of a tail, the muffled creak of the saddle, all seemed to wrap her in kind enveloping arms, and her tired, bewildered spirit rested, as one more happily placed might lean against a sympathetic shoulder.

Half asleep, her reins hung loose and it was only the sudden beating of rain upon her face that aroused her. They had come out into the open, a windy min-swept space where ten of the rides converged. Raby pulled up and took a long breath. Such a dean good smell of wet grass. She stooped over Romance and dropped a kiss on her glossy neck. After all, no world was wholly bad that held a good horse and open country. She was rested and her courage came back to her. Governesses had come and gone, some peaceably, some in a perfect tornado of rage and recrimination. The things that were permanent in Raby's life, hitherto, had been Bates and Biddy and the horses, and now there was Gran. Somehow she was certain that she had got hold of Gran "for keeps." In the many hours she had spent at Little Leadon during the last weeks one thing had impressed her most. It was how Tim and Nancy "were brought up" to be nice to people, to be considerate, to be polite, even though they were, what seemed to Raby, so tremendously loved and cared

for. And it was this recent experience of a househol where love and laughter, serenity and sympathy an good manners were common daily habits, that ha made her own volcanic surroundings seem less bea able than usual.

"My dear, we must go home," she said t Romance, who twitched her ears in response, "els that old turkey will be gobbling all over the place, and may even come across father. After all," and she squared her shoulders, "I suppose I must just stick it."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SNAP

When tea was taken up to the schoolroom at halfpast four Miss Gransmore's eyes were red and her face tear-stained. Raby was not back but she had almost forgotten Raby, her encounter with Mr. Verdon had been such a shock. It was so unlike anything her most extravagant flights of fancy had ever pictured.

Like many otherwise unimaginative people she indulged in day dreams. Day dreams with herself as leading lady, in the limelight and always in the

centre of the stage.

Thus it came about that in spite of warnings from both Raby's aunts that she would probably find their brother-in-law a hard nut to crack, she complacently conjured up an imaginary Mr. Verdon from whom the actual Mr. Verdon differed to an appalling extent. Both sisters declared, over and over again, that although they really knew very little about him they never had thought Vereker Verdon a nice man. They never approved of him even when he was first engaged to poor Anne: though then it did seem rather a good match from a social standpoint. But since her death there were rumours. . . . In spite of ominous hints, head-waggings, and Cassandralike warnings that she would find Raby herself a

handful—no governess ever stayed—Miss Gransmore gallantly made up her mind that she would succeed where all the others had failed: and not only as guide, philosopher and friend to that undisciplined child—she included the father in her benevolent intentions. By her tact, her womanly charm, and the force of those sunbeam qualities she was so conscious of possessing she would first of all melt the frozen heart of the undisciplined one's parent, finally raising it to a temperature which she mentally described as "an Indian summer of passionate love." Then, quite correctly, she would fill the void in Vereker's stricken life by becoming his wife, mistress of his house, and a personage among the at-present-estranged "county people," with whom she was to reconcile him.

This part of the vision did not include the undisciplined one. She had, most sensibly, been sent to school.

From the very first she would prove to Mr. Verdon that she was no ordinary, sad-coloured, educational drudge. Hence the wreath; the sparkling, sequined gown; the bright, playful conversation and sisterly attitude towards the often tiresome Raby.

Yet somehow everything had gone wrong. If on that first evening he had seemed distrait, unobservant and unresponsive, this afternoon he had been positively ferocious and terrifying. Worse than merely rude. Even her irascible brother, whose temper she charitably ascribed to long residence under a tropical sun, had never spoken to her like that. Never glared at her as though she were a noxious insect of some sort.

Was the man mad? He had practically given her notice too. And if she was to leave at the end of the term she would prefer to leave at once. Of course, claiming the whole term's salary. Her nerves—Mr. Verdon was not the only person in the world who suffered from nerves—were positively shattered. Miss Gransmore sniffed and poured out some tea, drank it, and felt better.

It takes a lot to shake self-confidence that is not founded on self-knowledge.

Perhaps she would overlook the afternoon's occurrences. It was a depressing day and sporting gentlemen were sometimes much affected by weather. Cook had made a delicious sponge-cake with violet icing, and the cream sent up with the tea—even morning tea—was always thick and good.

After all, it behoved a womanly woman to be patient; not to expect too much from man, that Powerful and mysterious arbiter of woman's destiny.

Miss Gransmore poured out another cup of tea and

decided she would try again.

When Raby got back Biddy was waiting for her to help her change. She was wet through, but rosy and bright-eyed once more. She had gone so far and so slowly that it was four o'clock before she turned homewards; but the rides were soft and she was able to canter most of the way. This had cheered her wonderfully.

"All afternoon your pa's kept sendin' messages to know if you was back," Biddy said, "and you was to go to him the minute you came in an' Miss Gransmore come herself to say you was to go to her, and now you are back you can't go to neither of them till you've taken off every stitch as you've got on. You're as wet, Miss Raby, as if you'd been goin' after pigs again."

"I s'pose I'd better do father first, but it is nuisance. It's tea I'm for, not people. What in t world can he want now?"

Raby slipped out of her wet clothes and sto naked and tall and slim while Biddy held garme for her as though she were but two years old. Bid thoroughly enjoyed such times as these, though a grumbled in a meek undertone all the time.

Raby had reached the petticoat stage (a wh princess petticoat with ribbon straps on the should instead of sleeves) and was sitting on a low ch while Biddy dried her hair, when the door v

opened noisily and her father hurried in.

He ignored Biddy, who melted away as he cross the large room and pulled up in front of his daught. He was flushed, his hair was rumpled, and he but out: "That Gransmore woman must go, she putively pervades the house. Nowhere am I safe fr her. Even when my eyes are not offended by grotesque presence, my ears are tortured by quacking and bleating. I tell you, Raby, she m go at once. I can't stand another day of her, a you must tell her so now—tonight."

"I must tell her to go," Raby repeated inc nantly, as she stood up, shaking her tousled hair b from her face. "You know that's impossi Father. No governess would go for me; and besi she doesn't make such a row as all that. You

not even seen her for three days."

"Haven't I?" Vereker retorted bitterly. "
sooner had you gone out of the house—(why did
go without asking me?)—than she came nos
downstairs. Creaking up and down and scatter
scent like a fox—cherry blossom or some such filth
and actually followed me out on to the door-s

where I'd gone to look at the weather. I won't bear it, I tell you. Is the house mine or not? You must do what I tell you, and damned quick, too. One thing's quite certain, I'll have no more such women in the house."

Raby lifted her long arms, shapely and white above the gauntlet of sunburn, and pushed her hair out of the way. "It's a beastly thing to have to do," she said, slowly, "and I'm not a bit sure I can make her understand."

"Make her understand!" he repeated, scornfully. "Why, even the imbecile she is must understand if you tell her I've said she is to go. Tell her I've got diphtheria, smallpox, typhoid—that we're all in quarantine and she'd better get out at once or she'll catch it. You understand? Get dressed quickly and settle it somehow—then perhaps I shall sleep tonight. At present she infests this place like a pestilence. God in heaven! What a woman!"

He was gone.

Biddy came creeping back to finish Raby's hair, making no comment on this sudden incursion.

Raby sat down again, thankfully, for her knees were shaking, while Biddy brushed and plaited and tied with meticulous care the usual large bow.

All desire for tea had left Raby. Instead of hungry she felt sick. A passionate distaste for these constant educational upheavals seized her like an illness. It was mean of her father to put this on her: and yet she couldn't refuse to do it, for she knew that however much she might hurt poor silly Miss Gransmore in the doing of it, she would hurt her less than he would.

Raby hated things to be hurt. But if it was a physical hurt you knew where you were, there were

things you could do. Once when the younge Chester boy had staked his horse out hunting it he been Raby who pulled the broken wood out of t gaping wound on the shoulder and waited for how it seemed to her, trying to stanch the blood wi handkerchiefs till he got the vet. They had prais her then and called her plucky. But she knew the this her father had told her to do needed far mo and a different kind of pluck; and, moreov demanded qualities that she did not possess. Rahad no tact, no diplomacy such as Miss Gransmowas so conscious of possessing; and no one knew the better than Raby herself.

And just then while she was struggling in this wildering mental mäelstrom Miss Gransmore, herse tapped at the door and came in with her poor to stained face, archly smiling: "Ah! my truant returned! What would she say if I had eaten all cake for tea? But no, I haven't and I've orde a fresh pot for her, and what's more I'll sit with while she has it. What a young Diana it is to hunting in the woods on such a day!"

Miss Gransmore had decided to overlook Ral disobedience and try the sisterly attitude ag: She had a vague recollection of some book entire "Wild Nature won by Kindness." Whether wild nature referred to was human or animal could not remember: but anyhow she'd try kindness.

If Raby's affection could be secured it might a great deal towards propitiating Mr. Verdon, v seemed to have taken a sudden and unaccounts dislike to her. She waited till Raby was realinked arms with her affectionately, and so entwithey went back to the schoolroom.

Biddy gathered up Raby's discarded dripping garments, scattered, as usual, all over the floor, and took them away to be dried. Her mild, sheep-like face wore an inscrutable expression, but it was less melancholy than usual.

"And now tell me all about your ride," Miss Gransmore remarked affably, as she handed Raby her cup. "I can't say I envied you today. I never was fond of going out in the wet. I'm rather like a pussy myself, I prefer the fireside to facing the elements."

Raby drank her tea at a draught, making strange gulping noises as she did so. Her throat seemed nanower than usual, and her lips were dry.

If only the poor old turkey had been cross it would

have been so much easier.

"My dear," Miss Gransmore said with studied gentleness and a Christian Science smile, "it's not quite the thing to drink so fast, and, if I may mention it, so loud."

"I'm awfully thirsty," Raby answered, holding out her empty cup, "I could drink buckets of tea."

"But you're not eating anything . . . have some of this nice bread and butter first . . . and then some cake."

Raby waved the bread and butter aside.

"Throw your 'eart over and then your 'orse'll follow like a bird," old Bates had said when he first taught her to jump. But that was so easy. Her heart didn't need any throwing. It simply soared, lifting her and the horse under her in a glorious rush that was like the sweep of wings.

Now her heart had descended into the pit of her stomach, and most indigestible her inside found it.

Miss Gransmore put a large piece of cake on her plate. "For once," she announced brightly, "we'll break the rule. I know very well children never want to keep their good things till the last."

Raby crumbled the cake on her plate. "I say," she began desperately, "don't you want to get out

of this?"

"Not at all, not at all," Miss Gransmore answered brightly, thinking that in her clumsy way Raby was referring to her presence at this belated tea. "Don't mind me, I'm quite happy."

Raby murmured something that sounded like "Oh Lord!" but Miss Gransmore ignored the improper exclamation and sat smiling at her with un-

diminished brightness.

"Look here!" Raby started again, licking her dry lips. "It's no use thinking you can stop. He won't have it."

"Stop where? Who won't have what?" the poor

lady asked, thoroughly startled at last.

"Father won't have you here. He's told me to tell you. Just before you came up. You oughtn't to have gone near him this afternoon. You didn't know—but that put the lid on."

Miss Gransmore and Raby stared at each other

across the schoolroom table.

"It's happened so often before," Raby added.

Miss Gransmore rose: "I simply won't take my dismissal from a chit like you," she exclaimed furiously. "How dare you? I'll see Mr. Verdon at once and find out for myself what he means . . . after my kindness and patience and all. I'll go to him at once." And she started for the door.

"I shouldn't if I were you," Raby said in a toneless voice rather like Biddy's. "He's in a bad mood
. . . you won't like it. . . ."

Gransmore paused at the door. There was, arresting quality in the tired young voice. ou mean," she asked breathlessly, "that your is not right in his head?"

lon't know—he's certainly funny sometimes, ink it's mostly temper."

Gransmore came back to the table and sat

on't understand," she said helplessly. "What wants? Am I to go at once, or wait till the the term? I assure you, I've no wish to stay 's any chance of his being . . . violent. He o be restrained. It isn't safe."

get out of it as quick as I could if I were caby answered wearily, "tomorrow."

my salary," Miss Gransmore exclaimed, rtainly not going without that."

they none of 'em go without that," Raby cheeringly, "that'll be quite all right."

: if I'd better not see him how am I to get

as astonishing how she seemed to lean upon that moment of general subsidence.

'll send it up to you in an envelope. You go ck; and when I tell him that, he'll write a directly, he'll be so pleased."

point of view did not appeal to Miss Grans-She drew herself up and drummed on the 7th her fingers. "It's to be for the whole mind, and," she added shrilly, "I expect is well. I must have my board. I'm entitled. Don't forget my board. I never was so, never in all my life before." And Miss nore rushed tempestuously from the room, ably to pack.

Raby poured herself out another cup of tea. It was black and rather bitter and she only tasted it. Through the door Miss Gransmore had left open Biddy appeared silently as a shadow. "I think, Miss Raby," she whispered, "as it would soothe your poor pa's spirit if you was to run and tell him Miss Gransmore's rang for her boxes."

He was standing on the hearthrug warming his back and balancing on his toes, a favourite trick with him.

She shut the door carefully and came and stood near him, leaning her arms on the top of one of the big leather chairs that flanked the hearth. It struck him that she looked curiously faded. Her skin was grey, she had dark smudges under her eyes and her hair seemed darker and less glossy than usual. Herappearance annoyed Vereker. She looked plain.

"You look tucked up," he said. "Rode too far,

I suppose. Well?"

"She's going, Father. Tomorrow."

"For this relief much thanks," Vereker quoted—"Was she violent?"

"Why, that's just what she said about you. She

thought you ought to be restrained."

Vereker's heels came down smartly on the rug—"What do you mean?" he asked. "What do you imply?"

She lifted her tired eyes to his face, considering him. "I think she thinks you're not quite right ir your head... dotty, you know," she explained.

"And you let her think so?—didn't contradict

her?"

"Well, it didn't seem worth while as she is going, and it made her quite willing to go."

Vereker frowned. "She mustn't go away thinking that. On no account must she be allowed to go thinking that. Don't you see, you little fool, that she might put about all sorts of hen-witted stories—that other people... people that matter, might believe? Don't stare at me like that, Raby."

"She wants her salary . . . and board. She was most particular about board . . . what's board,

Father?"

Vereker laughed. "Food, my child. Miss Gransmore evidently hankers after the flesh pots. What in the world have you done to your complexion? You're the colour of a slum child."

"Shall I take the cheque and board, Father? Will you write it? She is packing... then I can tell her you're not in the least dotty really and she's not to think you are."

"After all," Vereker said, grimly, "I think I'd better see the woman myself. Send her to me . . .

and don't come with her."

But Miss Gransmore flatly refused to see Vereker save "in the presence of a third person," and selected Jenkins as being both discreet and able-bodied.

That night her father forebore to rouse Raby, though he couldn't sleep. So he had plenty of time to consider the events of the evening and he was obliged to confess to himself that, with the buttons off the foils, Miss Gransmore had got under his guard.

CHAPTER XVII

A PROPOSITION

RABY slept all night and far into the morning till after mid-day. Biddy had guarded her bedroom door like a dragon, and this was an added drop in the bitterness of poor Miss Gransmore's cup. She had to break fast alone and was not allowed to go in and wake Raby to say good-bye, before leaving in the motor to catch a fast train to London. Vereker sent her to the junction to be sure she caught her train. She did not know and, being unobservant, had not noticed that her pupil was worn out by broken nights and her father's irritable importunities. She felt that this refusal to allow her to say good-bye to Raby was only one more of the atrocious "slights" to which she had been subjected at Leadon Hall. She didn't believe Biddy that Raby was still asleep, and was convinced that the child was "kept away" from her by her father's orders.

When she did wake Raby's feelings were mixed. She was sorry not to have taken leave of the poor old turkey, but was at the same time relieved that she had been spared a repetition of last night's scene. Miss Gransmore had cried stormily after her final interview with Vereker, and Raby felt that if she had cried again like that it would have been more than she could bear. Today, however, she was more able to bear things. It was rather amusing to get up for

instead of breakfast. Such a thing had never ened to her before. The sun, too, was shining Biddy was almost cheerful as she brushed her and gave her a message from old Bates that the by with the very black eye might now be taken from Sara.

ereker surveyed his daughter with grudging oval when they met at lunch. He had slept lly at all, but the certainty that now he could go re he pleased about the house without the iment risk of encountering Miss Gransmore had a hing effect upon his nerves. He never mend her name till Jenkins had brought in coffee and them. Then he lit a cigar and said, "You don't much shattered by the departure of your rness. Were your farewells affecting?"

We didn't say any farewells, Father. I was p and Biddy didn't call me—so I never saw her. sorry though."

Sorry! Can you honestly say you are sorry she gone?"

It's a mixty sort of feeling—I'm sorry for her." Why?"

aby knitted her brows. "I don't exactly know, pt that I think she liked being here and didn't to go."

Don't you become one of those fools who cultithe pathetic fallacy on a hot-bed of universal pathy. There's rather a vogue for that sort of py sentiment just now, and it does no earthly l. Never waste pity on other people. I'm tired ou. You can go back to Biddy. She, at all ts, isn't noisy."

Aren't you ever sorry for people, Father?" Raby d as she rose to go.

"For people, never. For one person, always and intensely."

"Who is it? Is it me?" she asked from the door, "You! you healthy young hedonist—sleeping fifteen hours on end! Rather not! Think it over and guess again."

In the hall she met Jenkins bringing a note on his

little silver trav.

'For you, Miss," he said, and handed it to her. "The young woman didn't wait for an answer."

The envelope was mauve, the writing large; the paper was scented and words here and there were heavily underlined. She was on her way to see Sara and her puppies and she walked slowly, reading as she went.

DEAR MISS VERDON,

Wherever have you been hiding all this time? I'm scribbling a line to remind you of your promise about that dinky little dog. I do hope you haven't forgotten. When are you coming to the pictures with us again?

Yours affectionately,

BABS.

She turned back and went into the garden and right round to the front of the house, where she sat down under a tree to think. Weeks ago, when she had just made the acquaintance of Lil and Babs they had told her how anxious they were to get hold of a roughhaired fox-terrier of good pedigree and "not too expensive." And she, much in the same lordly fashion that she had offered to mount Austin, had promised to give them one when Sara had her puppies. When she asked her father for the puppy with the "very black eye" it was destined for them.

t lately she had forgotten all about Lil and Babs, I had promised herself the pleasure of presenting puppy to Gran when he was old enough to leave ra.

Now, not only did she hate the idea of giving him Lil and Babs, but she knew perfectly well that it father would have the greatest objection to her oing anything of the kind, and would be furious if came to hear of it.

But she had promised.

Raby had a certain conscientiousness about romises that was not in any way the result of training or example, but purely the outcome of experience.

So often her father had broken his promises to her -and she did hate it. Time after time since they me to Leadon Hall had he said he would take her ver to see the Chesters in the afternoon. Time fter time had she got ready joyfully and waited for im in the hall or in the motor itself for over an hour, aly to be told at long last that he had changed his und and "he didn't feel up to going out that fternoon."

The sickness of hope deferred was familiar to laby, and deep in her childish soul she had vowed hat she would never promise anyone anything that he couldn't do. Yet she knew she was rather given promise things. The very fact of her social stracism made her anxious to swank a little when he got the chance. Lil and Babs had given her this hance at a time when she was very lonely; and now he realised what comes of making yourself cheap to algar company. Her father's broken, huddled gure as he spoke those words loomed in her mind he a menace. She had pictured so often the joy and pride of giving that puppy to Gran. He was

such a dear puppy—naughty and funny and affectionate—and Bates said all his points were so good.

Rigid and miserable she sat under the tree wondering what she had better do. So long did she sit and so deep in thought was she that she was quite startled when suddenly the motor slid purring to the front door, and her father, coming out on to the steps, saw her, and called to her to go and get ready. He was going over to the Chesters and would take her if she was quick.

There seemed crowds of people at the Chesters. Sons and sons' wives and many cheerful neighbours were sitting on the grass terrace above the two sunk tennis lawns, where vigorous mixed doubles were in progress. Diana, the most recent daughter-in-law, had just finished a sett as they arrived. They were introduced to her and Vereker was instantly attracted, because she was tall and pretty and vividly "in the movement" from the smooth waves of her dark hair to the tips of her slim white shoes. In a few minutes he had wandered away with her to find a more shady seat, leaving Raby to stand alone at the end of a row of empty chairs wistfully watching the agile figures on the lawn. She could not play, for she had never had the chance to learn.

Across the lawn in the shade she suddenly saw Gran sitting beside a tall fair girl. Gran waved and beckoned and Raby flew joyfully to join her.

"This," said Gran, introducing the girl, "is Lulu Lane-Harding; she's staying with me. Why have you never been to see us? I've expected you every day. You know the gardens . . . suppose you take Lulu round."

There are moments, sudden and shining as the ash of an electric torch in a pitch-dark room. Moments when an impression is received, so clear nd sharp that time itself can never wholly dim it. such a moment came to Raby just then, as, silent nd shy, she led Lulu Lane-Harding along a broad ath bordered on either side with lupins and delphiniums. Ever after she associated Lulu with tall, lender, blue flowers. She was like a flower herself, o fair and slim and soft of face. Pretty always, her profile was quite beautiful, her head so gracefully set, drooping a little as though weighted with its hick, straight hair, the colour of a new sovereign.

It was the profile that was presented to Raby, as, without turning her head, Lulu said, "I've heard a ot about you from Mrs. Underwood. All the week the's been hoping you would come and see her. Why lidn't you? Wouldn't your governess let you?"

Not the least of Lulu's charms was a delicious roice: full, musical and caressing. Raby didn't inswer directly and Lulu turned to look at her. She wasn't quite so lovely then: and Raby managed to numble, "I never seemed able to get away, but she's gone now, so I shall."

"Gone," echoed Lulu, "right in the middle of term—how ripping for you. I'm here just for my term holiday. It was too far to go home, so Mrs. Underwood kindly asked me. I came last night but I go back on Tuesday night. I'm at school at Hamthester, you know, St. Ursula's."

"That was the second name of my governess," Raby remarked, "and I think it's a brute of a name. Do you like it there?"

"Oh, most awfully. I'm in my last year though, alas! I shall hate leaving."

"I've never been to school," Raby confesser "Will you tell me—are they very horrid to ner girls?"

"Why should they be horrid?" the dulcet voic asked in astonishment. "No one was ever horrid to me . . . they've been sweet to me and I'm not on of the rich ones, either."

"Oh, you," Raby said thoughtfully, "that's differ ent. You're not queer. Would they be at all nice to me, do you think, if I could get father to let me go?

"Why not? And I can't see anything quee about you—quite the contrary. Do come, and com next term, to my house. Then I could look afte you. I shall be head girl then . . . I'm one of the prefects now."

"What's that?" asked the ignorant Raby.

"Now," Mrs. Chester exclaimed, dropping somwhat heavily into a chair beside Gran, "perhaps may do as I please for a few minutes. I think ever body's got going."

"Who is that man talking to Diana under the

trees?"

"That, my dear Esther, is Vereker Verdon."

"But I thought you said he never went t

parties?"

"He doesn't. He didn't know it was a party. H hasn't been near us for months, but he chose to com this afternoon and Diana has taken him on an doesn't seem to mind him. The modern youn woman is always interested in anyone who has shady reputation. They call it broad-minded."

"When Diana goes back to play—they won't le her sit out long—she's too good—will you introduc him to me, Agnes? I want most awfully to kno him for Raby's sake. What have they done wit

Miss Gransmore? The poor woman would have loved this."

"I don't know. I've hardly spoken to either of 'em. Where's Raby, by the way? I shall catch it from Jim if that child is found moping alone anywhere."

"Raby's all right. I sent her to show the gardens to Lulu."

Mrs. Chester laughed. "She won't be allowed to monopolise the fair Lulu for long. Seeing that the drinks are well in sight, I wondered why Billy and that other boy had suddenly vanished—now I understand."

"Look, Agnes, they're fetching Diana to play another sett. Now's your chance—take me over and introduce me, quick!"

Vereker Verdon had been making what was, for him, a tremendous effort. He did not know there was a party at the Chesters, though he guessed there was every chance of it. His coming was in no way influenced by a desire to give pleasure to his daughter.

He came, because in the last few days he realised that it was time he asserted his normality. He knew that for a long time past he had not been normal, but that was his own affair. It was awkward, though, when other people began to notice it, and when a disputatious governess insisted on the intervention of his own man-servant, he felt that it was time that she showed himself. That would silence any silly rumours that she or the servants might put about.

With something of defiance in his mood, he set about making himself agreeable to Diana. It was not difficult. She was, he decided, not likely to be shocked.

But now she had been reft from him by a tiresome young husband who wanted her to make up a sett; and before he could escape Mrs. Chester was down upon him and left him with an elderly woman whose name he didn't catch, who was probably a bore of the most malignant kind.

To his surprise she did not instantly begin to chatter but sat quite still, in what he found a restful silence.

Showing the yellowed whites of his eyes like a nervous horse, he stole a glance at her without turning his head.

Frankly middle-aged, big-made, with a good skin, faded but fine in grain, with plenty of grey hair under a shady hat, she was watching the tennis with interested eyes, nice blue eyes.

She was, he decided, of a pleasant appearance on the whole. One need not avert one's gaze as in the case of the dreadful Miss Gransmore; she did not offend the eve.

"I've always hoped to meet you, Mr. Verdon," she said, quietly, "because I want to thank you for allowing Raby to come and see me. She is a dear child and I enjoy her visits."

Vereker's queer eyes twinkled. "I fancy that Rab! has rather taken French leave as regards her visit to you," he said. "Only once have I formally beel asked for, or given permission... but I understand now why she was so anxious to call upon you. I only hope she hasn't been a nuisance."

"Raby," Gran said, "is one of those rare person who fit in, and she has the further inestimable gift o going when she starts to go. Don't you know th people who take ten minutes to get from a room to the front door, and then another ten minutes to ge outside that?"

"I used, occasionally, to know them. I don't now, because they never get inside my door. 'Set foot' is, I believe, the correct cliché—or is it 'darken'?"

She made no answer and he turned to her to find

her looking amused.

He was not slow. "You are thinking," he said, "of my daughter's governess, Miss Gransmore. It is true that she got inside my door and darkened it intolerably. But you must remember I had not seen her. She came in my absence. . . . Anyway," he added, viciously, "she has been hoofed out today."

"Do you mean she has actually gone—already?"

"Actually gone, thank God, this morning."

"To know that you had not previously seen her," she said, smoothly, "exonerates you from a charge I had, no doubt unjustly, brought against you . . . I feared you were wholly lacking in the selective faculty."

Vereker sat forward in his chair. "Do you imagine," he exclaimed, indignantly, "that I've nothing better to do than run about the world select-

ing governesses for Raby?"

"Surely no one has any real voice in their selection

but you?"

"Look here, Mrs. Underwood" ("Hope I've got her name right," he thought), "I can see that you think I neglect my duties. Well, let us leave it at that... I dare say I do. Duties always did bore me. You've doubtless heard enough from Raby to guess I'm not a model parent. But I'm at my wits' end what to do with that child. I can't stand a woman in the house... and what am I to do?"

"I don't think she'd be unhappy at a good school

-do you?"

"She can't go to school till the autumn, and even if she is to go to school then she can't run wild for

three months. Is there anyone here who would come in and give her lessons for an hour or two?—give her lessons and go away again promptly?—not hover. If you knew what I suffered in these last few days from the hovering of that dreadful woman . . ."

"She was rather dreadful," she agreed. "She was not fitted a bit for the post she'd taken. I don't fancy she could teach . . . much—could she?"

"Did you see her?" he asked, "or are you judging

purely by things Raby told you?"

"I called and she returned it, and I saw her on both occasions. . . I knew you were away . . . and I was anxious about Raby . . . I was more

anxious when I had seen the lady."

Vereker was leaning back in his chair with his hatilted over his eyes and his legs stretched out in from of him. He was no longer afraid of this pleasant grey-haired woman who radiated calmness and serenity. All the "get" in him was thoroughly roused and active. Might it not be possible to transfer these tiresome responsibilities to her broad but graceful shoulders? Women loved interfering is other folks' affairs. Let her interfere now, for Raby's benefit and, indirectly, for his. It was all very fatiguing. Still, if he could set this Mrs Underwood on to finding Raby a sensible woman to teach her something and keep her out of mischief—it would not be a wasted afternoon.

"Would two or three hours in the morning be

enough?"

"Quite enough in the hot weather . . . if there ever is any hot weather in this accursed climate."

"Would you let me have her?"

"You! What on earth do you want her for?"

"You think I couldn't teach her anything, but l

could—quite a lot. I'm not badly educated . . . you can examine me if you like. Of course, she would need to come to me, but it's quite near."

Vereker's eyes were fixed upon her hands loosely clasped in her lap. He had never seen a woman keep her hands so still. They were nice hands, too; brown, but well tended, with pretty filbert nails.

"I wish," he sighed, "you'd teach Raby to keep her hands like yours. Her nails are an outrage."

To his astonishment she dropped her hands to her sides, and looking at her he saw that she was blushing like a girl.

"Raby is only fourteen," she said. "A liking for clean nails is a later development, but I'll try to include lessons in manicure in the general scheme if you let me have her."

"And your fee?" he asked.

"I hadn't thought about fees," she said, "because, you see, it would only be for such a short time, just to fill a gap. I shall have my young nephew in the holidays, but if you'd let her come and play about with us then, as well, I don't think it would do her any harm. . . . You shall pay something if you like, for I know it's horrid to be under an obligation to someone you really know nothing about."

"May I smoke?" he asked.

If Gran had known, this was a concession. He rarely asked a woman's leave to smoke.

"Don't decide in a hurry," she said. "I know it

must seem to you a very queer proposal."

"What I'd like to know, if you'd tell me, is exactly why you make it. Is it pure altruism or do you get anything out of it? Don't mistake me, I'm not idiot enough to refer to fees."

"I shall get a tremendous lot of interest out of it.

You see, for about the first time in my grown-up lik I'm an idle woman. I really have nothing very urgent to do . . . and I'm getting old . . . and I want to keep young . . . in my mind. And the only way one can do that is to keep in touch with young

people."

"It seems to me," Vereker groaned, "that the young person is the most ageing influence there is. At least, I find it so. Raby, for instance, can never talk about anything that interests me in the least. After a meal with Raby I feel about eighty. A whole day in her society would convert me into an immemorial mummy. There are such an infinity of subjects one can't discuss with the young person . . . all of them interesting . . ."

"I think you're a bit old-fashioned. We're in 1913, remember, not the 'sixties. My own experience is that there is extremely little the rising generation does not discuss—and very interesting I find

their views."

"Raby's views, for instance?"

"Certainly Raby's views. She's no fool, I assure vou."

Vereker shook his head. "Possibly not—but each one of us belongs to his own period: and later middle life is lived on an island. At first the stream that cuts us off from youth may seem narrow as a thread, but every day it grows in width and velocity and we're left planté là, with precious little but memories to entertain us."

"What if we start building a bridge before it's too late?" she asked. "The youngsters will start in on their side to help us, if they see we're willing to handle their material—it must be theirs, mind—and uncommonly queer fantastic shapes the stones seem

"Perhaps you're right," he said, wearily, "but such attempts are only for the mentally strong and energetic. You, for instance, are probably the proud mother of several successful sons."

"On the contrary, I, like you, have an only

daughter, but she's happily married."

"How thankful you must be for that," he exlaimed, ironically . . . "all your responsibilities lifted . . ."

Gran looked at him. How desperately tired he remed! Was he really that ghastly colour, or was the effect of sunshine filtered through green leaves?

With a sense of relief she saw Mr. Chester coming owards them. "Agnes wants you, Esther," he called heerily, "they're going to tea. Tea's not much in ur line, Vereker, come and have a drink."

As Mrs. Chester had predicted, Raby was not left and in undisputed adoration of Lulu Lane-Harding. Illy Chester and two undergraduate friends joined hem and Billy, who, as a rule, rather went out of his ray to be decent to Raby, sent her to look for a sythical box of cigarettes in his room. When she ot back Lulu and Billy had vanished. The two oung men were eating raspberries and showed quite lainly that they had no use for her. So, by herself, he wandered round the warm fragrant old garden, umming a little tune. Not unhappily, for she was sed to being alone. Presently her steps led her towards the tennis again and she paused on the outskirts

of the lawn. She saw her father still under the tree: but now he was talking to Mrs. Underwood. She wondered whether she might join them. But if he saw her he made no sign, and just as she was beginning to feel a little lonely and uncomfortable Mr. Chester saw her and took her to see the horses.

There are things in life which can stir the heart to a passion of delight that is akin to tears. literature, music, the acted drama, exquisite dancing, each has this power to give such an indescribable thrill. And there be some who, like Mr. Chester and Raby, are in enthusiastic accord with the immortal "Johnny Connolly" when he declares, "As for cow nor dog nor any other thing, there's nothing would rise your heart like a horse."

Many pictures of that sunny summer afternoon were indelibly impressed on Raby's memory: but none was clearer than the Chesters' big vard, full then, of visiting motors and pony carts. The cool dark stables with their trim straw edging. The wise, kind faces of the horses looking over the doors; the whiffling snorts of recognition and affection; the indescribable savour of well-groomed horses and clean stables; the leisurely comfort and peace of it all—so soon to pass.

When the impartial distribution of lumps of sugar was completed and they turned into the gardens again, as they came in sight of the others Raby caught Mr. Chester by the arm: "Wait! I want to ask you something."

"Righto-go ahead." Jim Chester was a good "If you . . ." she began, and stopped. listener.

"If I . . . " he echoed."

ou'd promised something to somebody a long o, and forgot, and then you wanted awfully to to somebody else and the first lot reminded

Chester was a tall man. He looked down into cious eyes lifted to his: "But you can't the same thing to two people, can you?"

not promised to the second one. I never word . . . but I did promise it to the first and now they've reminded me . . ."

're quite certain it's yours to give."

; it's my very own."

Chester smoked for a moment and then took out of his mouth. "It's a bit complicated," "but I gather that you've promised someu have a perfect right to give—and now you t. Well, that's your fault, not theirs, isn't u shouldn't have been in such a hurry with omising. But having promised . . . There ich question, is there?"

ubbed her face against his shoulder, much as surite old horse had done a few minutes ago: that settles it. I'm glad I asked you. So nat."

wouldn't care, I suppose, to give rather

it wouldn't make any difference because I bu'd say just the same. . . You do think ully important to keep one's word—even for don't you?"

h me it counts for more than almost anything ler in man or woman. . . . Hi! Billy, come d take this child to have some tea."

tea she saw her father taking Lulu Lane-

Harding to see the delphiniums that she had alreaseen so many times that afternoon—and then it w time to go.

In the motor going home Vereker lay back wir closed eyes and Raby sat beside him silent and stithinking about Lulu Lane-Harding. How lovely sl was, how kind, how much everyone seemed to libher, and how greatly she herself longed to see he again. As if her father had read her thoughts suddenly opened his eyes, turned his head, and looke at her: "Some high-lookers this afternoon—cl Raby?"

"One anyway," Raby answered emphatically, sti absorbed in her dream. "I think Lulu Lane-Hardir is the prettiest person I've ever seen and the nicest

"Quite right, pretty and charming and wonde fully poised for so young a girl; clever, too. If mistake not, a deal too clever for her age . . . b don't you go and lose your heart to her . . . t you what; she's like a pink and white ice cream-uncommonly pleasant while you're eating it, but co tain to give you most infernal indigestion if you e too much."

"I'm sure," Raby retorted, indignantly, "Lx would never give anyone anything horrid. She's f too kind."

Vereker laughed. "You'll find, I fancy, that she never give anyone anything much except kisses a pretty speeches. She's one of the Takers—that's h metier—and if you can be content with ice cream f your daily diet, good and well—but most of us wa something rather more sustaining."

"How can you tell about people from just seein them once?" Raby demanded, passionately. "You said Lil and Babs were light and I mustn't go with them, and now you say Lulu's like an indigestible ice cream. Anyway, ice creams don't give me indigestion; though" she added ruefully, "I've never had one anything like every day."

"Eat your ice cream, child. I won't stop you. Only remember that your horrid old cynic of a father warned you . . . because, God help you! I believe you've got a foolish, big, soft heart."

CHAPTER XVIII

NEW LAMPS

Next day, Sunday, Raby rushed to Little Lea immediately after lunch, in the hope of furthering worshipful acquaintance with Lulu Lane-Hardi and the GODS were propitious. Gran was indewriting letters, but Lulu was seated on the law the shade, making a crape de chine night-gown making it uncommonly well.

It is not usual to look upon sewing as an æsth accomplishment, but, as practised by Lulu, it is For years Raby had watched Biddy sew without smallest thrill of admiration. During the last we she had seen Miss Gransmore sew unnumbered tir and only thought how tiresome it seemed. But no she felt she would give anything to sew herself only she could look in the smallest degree like I as she did it. Lulu, with her pretty head bent so tously over her work; her right hand moving is assured dexterity, in and out among the filmy for silk and lace. Lulu, in a cool lilac linen from the fillest of lilac ribbon binding her fair helooked for all the world like a graceful spray of suppeas.

She sewed so well, too.

She didn't need to give the whole of her attent to her work by any means. At once she made R

el a privileged person. She trusted her, confided her, treated her as though Raby, too, was praccally grown-up instead of a gawky young creature ist turned fourteen.

Sitting on the ground, her long arms clasped round er knees, her eyes glued to the pretty figure in the ong chair, Raby listened entrancedly to the musical oice that was so frank and revealing.

"This is not for me," Lulu said of the night-gown. I'm making some for a rich girl I know, to earn a ittle pocket money. Not at school: I couldn't do it here, because there'd be far too much chat: but I tnew I'd have time up here, so I brought it. It's wonderful what a lot of sewing you can get through if you use up all the odd minutes, and I hate sitting with idle hands."

"How good you must be!" Raby exclaimed in stonished admiration. "I'm afraid my hands are dways idle except when I'm riding."

"We're poor as rats, you know," Lulu explained, tobly disclaiming any particular virtue, "my people mean. I shall have to go out and earn my own wing the minute I leave school—but I don't mind hat. I wouldn't stay at home for worlds—it would e quite too deadly."

This was most exciting. It had never occurred to laby that people who looked like Lulu went out to arn their living. Why, even Lil and Babs didn't tem to do that!

"What'll you do . . . sew?" she asked with deep oncern.

"Oh no, only at odd times. There's no money in lat unless you have a business. I expect I'll train or a secretary. I dare say my aunt will stand the tes: she's paying for my education, you know, or

I would never be at St. Ursula's in such an expensive house. When I'm trained I shall be on my own. won't live in if I can possibly help it. I want to be extremely independent. Then you can know who you like, go where you like and dress how you like I shall have crepe de chine night-gowns then."

"Live all by yourself in your own house?" Ral

asked in astonishment.

Lulu laughed. "My dear, I shan't have a hou not for ages. Perhaps, if I get on I may have a litt flat with another girl who works. That's what I like."

Raby instantly felt a poignant envy of this for tunate other girl, who was to live with Lulu. "B I thought," she said, "people like you—so beautif I mean—always got married. Don't you want get married?"

"Oh, I suppose I shall get married some time Lulu said carelessly, "but not for a long time. I in no sort of hurry. I want to have lots of fun best I do that. . . . From what I've seen of marrias it doesn't particularly attract me. What are y

going to do when you've grown up?"

"I've never thought about it," Raby confess humbly. "I suppose I shall hunt in winter. I do know what I shall do the rest of the time. What people do?"

"Nowadays people do lots of things," Lulu si briskly, "even rich people. Some go in for politic

"What's politics?"

"Oh, the suffrage and that. I'm not keen ab it myself, but some of the girls are—frightfully."

Raby was hopelessly puzzled but was ashamed ask further. She mentally noted the word suffra and decided to consult Bates.

"But whatever I do," Lulu went on, "it's going to be in London. There you can have lots of fun even if you aren't very rich, if you're nice and amusing, and I intend to be both."

"You are both," Raby exclaimed. "I've never met anyone half so interesting. Do tell me some

more."

Lulu was nothing loth. She described her home "at the other end of nowhere" in Herefordshire. She drew a graphic picture of her father, a retired Naval man, austere, choleric, and so often "very difficult"; of her mother, meek, beautiful and "conventional to her finger tips"; of her two brothers, one going to be a doctor, the other at Sandhurst—"the greatest dears." Lulu, herself, came in the middle, and she declared that her people's sole idea of the why and wherefore of daughters was that they should "be useful in the house."

One thing was made clear to Raby—that she did not stand alone in having a queer father. Captain Lane-Harding seemed quite as disagreeable and much more interfering than her own; for Lulu said "he thinks everything wrong that's the least bit pleasant." Moreover, he suffered from periodic bouts of abysmal gloom, "when no one's allowed to draw up the blinds in any of the sitting-rooms." "In fact," she concluded, "we look upon father as a blight."

This was a new view of fathers to Raby, accustomed as she was to Biddy's dutiful exhortations concerning the proper attitude towards parents.

"If you're half a minute late for prayers he's cross for a whole morning. I'm deeply religious myself," Lulu continued, looking like a young angel who might soar into the blue at any moment, "but I'm one of

those who think it ought to make you pleasanter and more affectionate to everybody, not stuffy and horrid What's your father like? He seemed very jolly, to me, yesterday: not a bit prim and sticky."

"I shouldn't call him prim," Raby said, cautiously. Somehow she didn't feel called upon to discuss her father with Lulu. "Do you like horses at all? I could show you ours if you did . . . "

"I'd adore it. We had a pony when I was little and I used to ride it . . . but that's ages ago."

"When will you come?" Raby asked eagerly. "Would you walk round with me now? It's quite near, and it all looks extra nice on Sunday afternoon."

"I'd love it but I don't think I must come just now," Lulu said with undiminished sweetness. "Mrs. Underwood might think it rude of me. . . . come tomorrow morning if you'll fetch me . . .

Just then Billy Chester strolled across the grass and sat down at Lulu's feet; and somehow, in quite a few minutes, Raby felt rather in the way. wasn't anything either of them said, Lulu was even more kind and affectionate than when they were alone, but somehow she felt out of the picture. So, with the decision that Gran admired, she said she must go home, and went.

It never occurred to her to go into the house and look up Gran. Lulu filled the horizon and she was fain to brood over the beatific vision vouchsafed to

"I do like Raby," Billy Chester exclaimed, as the garden door closed behind her, "she's a real nice kid."

Monday passed and as yet Gran had heard nothing

from Vereker Verdon as to her scheme. In the ng Raby had fetched Lulu to show her Leadon r and the horses, but neither of them saw him, was not up. Gran took Lulu to a garden party afternoon, and in the evening saw her off in the for Hamchester, about sixteen miles distant. It hot evening and very light. Gran, who, after ars in London, could never have enough of the n, went out to dead-head roses. That was one e few things Bannister graciously encouraged do.

: was feeling rather lonely, for she missed Lulu, was a delightful visitor. Her manner to older n being a subtly compounded mixture of defer-ind camaraderie very stimulating to the middle-

She heard a bell ring in the house; and the little Mrs. Bannister came across the grass ds her, announcing "Mr. Verdon, Madam; he if you were disengaged, and I said I thought Gran pulled off her gloves and hurried back little drawing-room.

's an unconventional time to call but it's cooler the afternoon. I thought that perhaps I be lucky enough not to impinge on other

looked just as pale and exhausted as she had im at the Chesters, and she realised what an it must have been for him to come. Therefore elcome was particularly gracious.

ou haven't repented your most kind offer about?" he asked.

ertainly not. I've been trembling lest it was ho had repented a sort of half acceptance." ut, of course, I accept most gratefully."

Ir. Verdon, there's something I must ask you

before you trust Raby to me and it's this. As she is to go to school in the autumn, do you mind if I give her an idea of the sort of religious teaching she'll meet with there. Nothing dreadfully dogmatic... only, from what I've seen of Raby, I fancy she'd rather surprise them if she isn't warned."

"Having no religious convictions myself," Vereker said, airily, "I have, naturally, not imparted

them to Raby. Has she any?"

"She has, and to my thinking they are entirely sound and I wouldn't change them for the world. But they are, if I may say so, more Elizabethan than is usual in the present day. I mean she isn't so solemn about it all as most of us seem to think necessary. It's only in the last three centuries that gloom and solemnity have come to be considered so much an integral part of religious training."

"I always did think the blasphemy laws had a great deal to do with the revolt from dogma of thinking people," Vereker remarked in polite agreement,

"but pray go on . . . you were saying . . ."

"Only that Raby's conception of the Deity is, I'm pretty sure, that of a kind and humorous person rather like Jim Chester, always ready to help you out of a hole, who might, if you were very tiresome, chastise you, but who is far more likely to be amused by your vagaries than angry. And it's this I want her to keep. At the same time she must, if she is to escape trouble and misunderstanding, show a little deference in speaking of sacred things . . . do you understand what I mean? So far as I can judge, all Raby's views are sound—but they are very . . . blunt?"

"I understand perfectly, and it will be very good of you if you will teach her to be respectful to convention in more than mere religion. Raby's mind

is extraordinary crude. She has no sense of fine shades. It's that, I think, that makes her society so tiring."

Vereker was lying back in his chair, his eyes nearly closed. Yet he spoke incisively and clearly. Gran longed to shake him in spite of his white face. The calm way in which he discussed his daughter as though she were a rather uninteresting psychological problem irritated her.

"Do you know, Mr. Verdon," she said earnestly, "that I think you have had simply wonderful luck in your servants . . . I mean the Biddy and Bates that Raby talks about."

"I could never tolerate incompetent servants," he said, coldly.

"But they might have been very competent so far as you were concerned and yet have been horrible people to have in constant association with a little child. It's there that your amazing good fortune comes in—though I," she added, "prefer to think it was Providence looking after Raby."

She longed to quote the proverb about children and drunken folk, but refrained.

He opened his eyes. Those queer, light, tilted eyes that were so bright in his mask-like face. The soft June night was spreading a grey haze over everything and it was getting dark in the little drawing-room.

He looked at her steadily and she felt his eyes upon her with a curious shrinking. There was something tragic and painful in their gaze.

"I know exactly what you're thinking," he said, wearily, "that the kind and humorous God you and Raby believe in, has looked after her but has rather lost patience with me."

"Remember," she said, "I believe in a good deal

that you, from what you say, think mere foolishness: and," she added, vigorously, "I'll do my best to teach it to your daughter."

He dragged himself heavily out of his chair and stood looking down at her. "When may she come?" he asked abruptly.

"You trust me then?"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Because you consider me callous, cynical, unnatural—what you will, it doesn't follow that I am altogether a fool. Am I likely to let slip such an opportunity for peace and quiet, accompanied by," with a little bow, "what you would doubtless esteem even more, a good conscience? I've done, or rather you've done, the very best thing possible for Raby. I ask you, is it likely that I should fail to grasp the skirts of such a happy chance?"

Gran laughed. "It's nice to be called a happy chance. So often as one grows older one is con-

scious of being rather a dismal certainty."

"I'll send Raby round to you tomorrow morning. Will ten be too early?" He rose and held out his hand.

"Wait," Gran said. "Let me get you a peg. I expect my servants have gone to bed. They get up very early and I have told them never to wait for me. I'll fetch it in a minute."

She disapproved of Vereker Verdon but he was her guest; and she had lived long years in the East.

He shook his head, intense amusement in his eyes. "No thank you—really. But it was broad-minded of you, considering all you have probably heard about me from Mrs. Chester. Good-night, Mrs. Underwood. Don't tempt me to be one of those detestable people who prolong their farewells."

NEW LAMPS

189

He was gone: Gran stood in the doorway looking down the Roman Road. She was pleased. She was even triumphant.

But what would Cicely say?

CHAPTER XIX

CHANGE

CICELY said a good deal. Mainly to the effect that if Gran wanted to give lessons to anybody, surely her own grand-daughter would have been a more suitable pupil.

When Gran pointed out that Nancy was still rather young and was not on the spot, Cicely said she might at least have offered to teach Nancy, before tying

herself up with this strange girl.

What with Johnny in the holidays and this Verdon child in the term, was she, Cicely, never to see any-

thing of her own mother?

Such an odd thing to do at Gran's time of life. One would think she ought to be glad to stay there quietly looking after her house and garden. It was indeed a restless age when even grandmothers seemed to find it necessary to look outside the home circle for occupation.

Then Gran pleaded that it was only a temporary arrangement; that Raby was going to St. Ursula's at Hamchester in the Autumn, to the same house as

Lulu Lane-Harding.

Here Cicely asked in serious tones whether Gran "thought it quite right to the other girls? The dear Miss Wades were so careful always . . . but they couldn't know about everybody . . . and of course

Mrs. Chester had arranged this . . . was it quite straightforward to send her without any explanation?—a child with such a dreadful father . . . and such an extraordinary lack of proper bringing up. A childhood passed among grooms and stablemen—"

And so on, without any effect either upon Gran's arrangements or her placidity. Poor Cicely was jealous, and her mother knew from painful experience in the past, that to the jealous nature, argument and explanation are but as running your horses on a rock and ploughing thereon with iron.

Raby had been going regularly to Little Leadon for three weeks when her father sent word she was to dine with him. She had seen very little of him. Her days were full and happy, and when they did meet occasionally at lunch he never asked any questions. This rather disappointed her, for she was bubbling over with her new experiences and longed to publish them abroad.

Biddy had dressed her carefully in a new frock, amethyst-coloured, of the same delicious material as the night-gown Lulu was making. It, and the silk stockings that went with it, had been got from London specially to match the pendant. It was a "young lady's frock," with almost low neck, elbow sleeves and a narrow skirt. She felt dignified and grown-up as she went downstairs, slowly, admiring each silken ankle as she thrust it out.

Ever since the dreadful night when her father had laughed at Miss Gransmore she always looked at his hands. Never again had she seen them dirty. Tonight they were immaculate and she felt that her own, too, would bear inspection. She was learning to take care of her nails. So many new interests had

opened up before her of late: even with her father she was less conscious of being clumsy and overgrown: less afraid of his quizzical gaze.

"You look very pleased with life," he said. "What d'you do all day that you find so amusing?"

"I'm awfully busy," Raby answered importantly. "I've a lot of home work to do—and then," she added, "I see more people—and hear things."

"It's a success then? You like going to Mrs. Underwood? You haven't quarrelled with her yet?"

Raby looked almost shocked. "You can't quarrel with people who are nice to you all the time," she said.

"It has been found possible," Vereker said, dryly, "but I'm glad to hear that you and she get on so well. What do you do, by the way?"

Raby paused with a bit of fish on the end of her fork. "We read The Times. I know how to look for things in it now, and we look for the places they mention in maps. And we read the Bible and the New Testament and Punch and history. History of now. Not old kings and wives. I suppose we'll get to them some time, but there's all this century first, thirteen years of it. And we read lots of other things. I like 'An Irish R.M.' best, and 'All on the Irish Shore.' Do you think we might live a winter in Ireland and hunt there?"

"Anything else?" her father asked.

"Oh yes. Poetry—Newbolt and Henley and that nice Irishman—and she's going to write to you about sums and things: she thinks I ought to have somebody else—I'm rather quick. And I'm learning grammar—nouns and verbs and why you mustn't say 'like I do.'... And the Catechism—she said I'd better, before I go to school. Did you learn the Catechism, Father?"

"I suppose I did. I went to school, you know."
"Well, what did you think of it?"

"I didn't think of it."

"But now—what do you think of it now?" she persisted.

Vereker shook his head. "No, Raby, I'm not to be drawn, but I'm quite ready to be interested in your views."

But Raby also declined to be drawn on the subject of the Catechism, and it was rather a silent meal until Jenkins had left them at dessert, when she asked suddenly, "Was I ever christened, Father?"

"You were."

"Have I got god-fathers and god-mothers?"

"I suppose so, but I really forget who they are. You were christened in a great hurry just after your mother died, and everything was so . . ." Vereker paused. "Upon my word, I don't remember, Raby. Biddy will know."

"It doesn't matter, only I don't think they were much good, after such tremendous promises—do you?"

"It's a difficult matter to interfere with other people's children. And, after all, you can't promise things for anyone else—it can only be a form: a figure of speech."

"Well, it seems to me a pretty mean thing to make promises, and then say they were a figure of speech."

"Don't be sledge-hammer. Circumstances vary. One may make promises in the utmost good faith but things may happen that render it impossible to keep them. In fact I can imagine circumstances when it would be dishonourable to keep them."

To his astonishment Raby blushed up to the roots of her hair, but she did not lower her eyes. Her large, earnest gaze met his enquiringly. "You've

finished dinner, Father? It won't spoil it if I tell you something that will make you curse?"

"If it will make me curse, why tell it me?"

"I've got to," she said, "I must: and Bates, too, thought I ought. He was very vexed himself. And vet I know I was right."

"Have you lamed Romance?"

"Oh, it's nothing so bad as that. You do remember saying I could have that puppy of Sara's, don't you, Father?"

"Perfectly. And it seems to me that if you don't want to keep him he would be a pleasant gift for your friend Mrs. Underwood-if she cared to have him."

Raby opened her eyes in great surprise. "Why, that's just what I wanted to do—only I can't. I've

given him to somebody else."

This time it was Vereker who opened his eyes, and his eyebrows shot up to his hair: the silence was ominous and Raby trembled.

"Well?" he said.

"It was like this," she faltered. "You remember those two girls you said I wasn't to go with . . . "

"You don't mean to say you've given that valuable puppy to those girls?—without asking me? Do you know what Bates got for the others?"

"Yes, Father, and he was awfully vexed about it -but I'd given my word. I promised before ever you knew I went with them. I'd promised and then you said I could do exactly what I liked with him-you know you did."

"You knew that I wished you to have nothing to

do with those young women."

'Well, I haven't-not since you made such a fuss. And I haven't wanted to-much. But I had to keep my word."

"Why didn't you come and ask me about it first?"
"If I had come . . . what would you have said?"
"Probably have told you to go to . . ."

"Hell," she promptly concluded the sentence. "Suppose I went some day—what'd you do?" she

added gloomily.

"We won't discuss that just now. Let's keep to the point. You're great on keeping promises: but what about your promise to me?"

"I've never seen them. I sent Iles with him. I hated him going"—the tears were in Raby's eyes—

be was so sweet."

"Suppose they ill-treat him?"

"They won't do that. They're kind as kind: but they'll spoil him . . . and I did want him so for Gran. She'd have loved him."

Raby's strawberries were lying untasted on her plate.

Vereker sighed. "You're a crude, wrong-headed young person," he said, "but I didn't think before that you were underhand. Your sense of honour is queerly twisted. Why didn't you come and explain the whole thing to me before you did anything, instead of only telling me when the mischief's done?"

"Because I knew you didn't mind about

promises."

"It depends on the promise," Vereker said, wearily, "but no woman, young or old, ever understands this. You're wrong though. I don't say I'd have let you send that particular dog: but a dog they should have had. You were honest to them and damnably deceitful to me. Moreover, you implicate other people. Because you can twist old Bates and Iles round your little finger, you implicate them as well. You teach them to deceive me too."

"Bates was very unwilling to let Iles take him," Raby mumbled, "but I told him you'd said I could do as I liked with him, so he gave in."

"It's evidently more than time this ménage came to an end—so perhaps it's just as well things are s

they are."

"What do you mean, Father? Are we going

away from here?"

"You go to school, as you so ardently desire, in September—what does it matter to you?"

"There's the holidays."

"You'll have to take your chance of those. Anyway there will be no horses or dogs for you to give away, for I'm giving it up. All of it."

"Giving up the horses! Which?"

"All of 'em."

"But we must have horses—we've always had them."

"Why should I keep horses when I no longer ride?"

"But me! I ride."

"We may sometimes afford to hire a hack for you."

"Hire! . . . me! not have a horse of my own?"
"A great many estimable young people have no

horses of their own."

"But I've always had them. Father, are you teasing me or do you mean it?"

"I mean it, my dear Raby. I mean it very

seriously indeed."

"The mares and all?"

"The mares and all."

"Does Bates know?"

"Not yet; he will tomorrow."

"Are we ruined?" she demanded tragically.

"Not quite, perhaps, but we shall be if this, sert of ning goes on. Besides it no longer interests lime. Therefore it's going to stop."

ob nov illo

"Father, are you doing it to punish me?"

"Really, Raby, you're not quite souimportant as all that."

"But what's to become of me?" nA.

"That remains to be seen and depends largely

upon yourself."

Raby sighed and turned to her strawberries. Regardless of her father's possible feelings, she mashed them. She showered sugar upon them, and then cream. Finally she ate them while her father watched her with a gloomy sort of amusement.

"Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," he quoted, "but you aren't exactly hilarious."

"Perhaps they're the last I'll get," she remarked, referring to the strawberries.

"You don't ask what I'm going to do?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Try to get some small modicum of health if I an. Don't you realise, you self-centered young person, that I'm a very sick man?"

"Bates said you ought to see a doctor, some time

ιgo."

"Bates said that, did he?"

"Father, if Bates goes, how am I ever to see him? And what about Biddy?"

Vereker felt angry and hurt.

The puppy, the horses, Bates, Biddy—mention any of these and you could bring that soft look of affectionate solicitude to Raby's face. While to him, to her own father, she was indifferent, matter-of-fact, hard as nails.

"Why should I care what happens to you, where

you go, or whom you see or don't see?" he a coldly.

"Well, you don't . . . much-do you?"

"More, perhaps, than you either realise or serve. How much do you care for me? As pared, for instance, with Romance or Bates? I stare at me. Answer."

"I like you better now, than I did before we chere," she said slowly, "better than when we in those other houses where such a lot of people to come and stay... those pretty ladies Biddy would only let me look at through the win... and you always 'shooed' me away if I canywhere near... why did you, Father?"

He leant across the table to look at her. "I do you go back on all that now? What do

mean? What do you know?"

"I don't know anything except that you spectrally just now because I love Bates. He very kind to me when I was little. So was Bi but Bates made a fuss of me and I did like it. So little children are loved such a lot . . . I k now."

He dropped back in his chair again.

"I've not been a success as a father, Raby; bu after years, when you judge me, as you will do: to remember that while I made a pretty bad mes my own life, I tried to keep you clear of it in so as I could . . ."

"I wonder if I shall make a mess of mine."

"That depends on you."

"Could you have helped it, Father?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, I shall try to. I shouldn't care to be you."

"Really, Raby," he exclaimed, "you are

unfeeling girl I've ever come across. Go to and pray—if you do pray—for a more symetic heart. Don't sit there staring at me. Go." t the door she paused. The room was dimly lit, 'ereker would never have anything but shaded les on the table, but they were reflected, in little ts of light, in the cross on her breast and in the mering folds of her dress. To Vereker's tired she looked the embodiment of radiant youth and th, standing there tall and straight, as she said, er breathlessly, "I'm sorry, Father, that you're tedy. Mind, if you're jumpy in the night you to for me.

he child was gone.

impy!

aby rushed out into the garden. Her house of was crashing about her ears. She was too batdand bewildered to go upstairs. Her father had rived to make her the pivot on which these tering changes worked.

fter she had walked up and down the drive some dozen times she seemed to come to a decision ome sort, for she went back into the house, and ight to the dining-room.

ler father was still sitting where she had left him; ing at the candles. The decanter of port was not e empty. The room seemed very warm with its k smell of wine and fruit.

he had come in so quietly, and he was so deep in ight, that he started when she appeared at his

Father," she said, "is it because St. Ursula's is expensive that we've got to give up everything? because of me?"

Ie half turned, leaned his elbow on the table and

his head on his hand, looking up at her. "It will be confoundedly costly, of course."

"Well, then, shall I not go? Then Bates and

Biddy can stay and . . . "

"No, my dear Raby. You've pestered me to let you go to school. I've filled in forms and things till I'm dizzy: and spent several exasperating hours with Jim Chester on your behalf. So now you're going to school, and if you don't like it don't blame me. You've chosen your part."

"But you never told me that if I went to school

everything else must go too."

"All these years," he said, wearily, "I've kept up this expensive establishment for you; and precious little thanks I've got for it; from you least of all."

"But you never explained, Father."

"It's not usual to consult a chit of fourteen about these things: most of all in circles where they arrange their lives according to the tenets of the Church Catechism. By the way, isn't there something in that guide to conduct about duty to parents?"

"Yes. I said that bit today—'to love, honour and

succour my father and mother."

"Exactly. Well, I'm not unreasonable. I'm quite ready to admit that I've given you no reason either to love or honour me. Had I been consulted when they drew up that clause, I would have prefaced it by 'where possible.' We'll let the love and honour slide—but, mind, I shall expect the 'succour' when the time comes. You know what it means?"

"Yes; I do. She explained it today. Father,

would you like me to come away with you?"

"There's nothing I should dislike more. But keep the succour in your mind. I may claim it some day." "Perhaps," here her solemn face suddenly npled, "it's only a figure of speech, like the godhers and god-mothers."

He laughed. "There are moments, Raby, when lare to hope you are not as stupid as you appear. It that your being stupid matters much while you ep that complexion. Not for the next ten years, yhow. So, be off, my child, to bed, and preserve

"Father . . . what about Sara?"

Vereker dragged himself to his feet. "If you ask any more questions," he thundered, "I'll take u by the shoulders and put you out."

She looked at him. "You couldn't, you know," e said, quite gently. "I believe I could pick you and carry you."

He dropped into his chair again. "I believe you uld," he sighed, "so, as you are strong, be erciful."

She had gone. Without another word she had one.

But her image stayed with him. The little points light reflected in the tiny diamonds that outlined e amethysts upon her breast. The large serious es that could suddenly look so gay and misievous. The strength of her. The fragrance. he crudity. The dreadful downrightness that was fatiguing.

And she was his.

And because she was his she must have her chance.

CHAPTER XX

THE YEARS BETWEEN

In looking back, some of us seem to have slipped almost imperceptibly from childhood to youth, and from youth to middle age. There are others, again, in which one particular period is seen sharply defined, as a cleavage hewn by the axe of Fate. When the accustomed becomes definitely the past; and new experiences crowd one upon another, hustling us forward with a speed that leaves all that has gone before so strangely distant; that looking back, even a short while after, life is seen through the golden haze that always seems the atmosphere of very youthful memories.

So was it with that summer when Raby did lessons with Gran.

Hitherto the years had worn a certain sameness. Whatever house they were in was in the country. Horses were led in and out of the stables. Foals grew into yearlings and two-year-olds. Sales at Newmarket were cheering—sometimes; more often the reverse. Dogs, it is true, occasionally grew old and then vanished mysteriously. But whatsoever the house, in whatsoever part of England, Biddy and Bates and the horses were as fixed stars in her firmament. Even Jenkins had attained to a sort of permanence, for he came with them to Leadon Manor and they had been there three years.

Now, in that summer so full of new sensations and ew friends, she had to face the fact that all she had poked upon as static was soon to be swept away.

In that summer, too, her father had emerged from he mists of bewilderment in which his strangely disributed rages and incomprehensible vocabulary had itherto obscured him, and he had taken a definite lace, not as the enigmatical autocrat of the past; but s a rather pathetic fellow-creature, who, though nore puzzling than ever, yet called forth in Raby hose instincts of help and compassion hitherto reerved for suffering animals.

Among the new experiences was Johnny, a small, hin, tirelessly energetic boy. Two years younger han Raby, and a whole head shorter, he made up for my deficiences of weight and stature by his cool

competence in games she had never played.

Under his scornful but persistent tuition she learned to bat indifferently, to bowl rather well, and to make some surprisingly good catches. She learned to play fives against the stable wall, and to beat him in a single at tennis. He was always dreadfully superior over games, but when it was found that the only animal he could sit with any safety was the patient old pony that pulled the Leadon lawn mower, Raby got a bit of her own back. And Johnny was forced into a reluctant respect for a girl who could take Kentucky over jumps in the paddock which, with Iles on his back, he had refused again and again.

"It's 'er 'ands, sir," Bates explained to Johnny. "It's a gift as comes from above and if you ain't got

'em, nothing'll give 'em to you."

School.

The old life left behind.

204 THE LAST OF THE DYNASTY

School, the great adventure, and the most sur-

prising.

No one laughed at her. No one was unkind. Lulu was there: infinitely removed and splendid in her prominence as Head Girl in the House. Yet sweet and friendly and remembering when she got the chance.

Slow with her pen, quick with her mind, untidy, muddly, much given to break rules, Raby settled to the collar sooner than anyone expected.

Even Cicely allowed that she was rather a success at school, and occasionally had her out for a Sunday, to the joy of Nancy and Tim.

Holidays with Gran and the Chesters.

Occasional letters from her father, who had gone to California for the winter. Dull, dutiful little letters to him on the first Sunday of every month. More frequent letters to Biddy and to Bates, and one, every alternate week, to Gran and Mrs. Chester.

The first summer holidays; and that fourth of August when the old world passed into the limbo of

the Scrapped.

Billy Chester killed in the battle of the Marne. Young Bates missing, nor ever found, on the Somme.

Holidays at the Chesters'. Such a sad, changed, busy house. Mrs. Chester never rests. All the horses gone except one old hunter of Billy's and one cart horse. But there is plenty of work: and for the holidays Raby looks after the horses to spare Mr. Chester to his tribunals and committees. There is no groom. Tim Chester missing, nor ever found.

Girls who were at school last year are now in France and Belgium. Little Leadon is let and Gran in lodgings working at the Casterly hospital.

Mrs. Bannister cooking for convalescent officers in

a big house in London, and Bannister working at Munitions.

1916. Hard to be at school when one is tall and strong, when one could work on the land or in munitions if one wasn't good enough to nurse. But no one will listen. Very few, brief letters from America: but what there are contain most definite refusal to consider any curtailment of school. Not one day before eighteen.

And school goes on, saturated with the war; but

it goes on.

Everyone tearingly busy, even the girls. Everyone anxious and strung-up. Everyone preparing always for the glorious time when they, too, will definitely serve.

So school goes on.

Holidays with her aunts at Blackheath. Handsome, well-dressed, elderly ladies, who know even less of life than Raby herself. How they would have infuriated her father, for they talk in *clichés* and are always shocked. Bad food, bad—extraordinarily bad—servants, who both leave at a moment's notice and are impossible to replace. A new experience this. House work, lots of house work. Raids: but no fun, because one can't see anything. A horrid holidays.

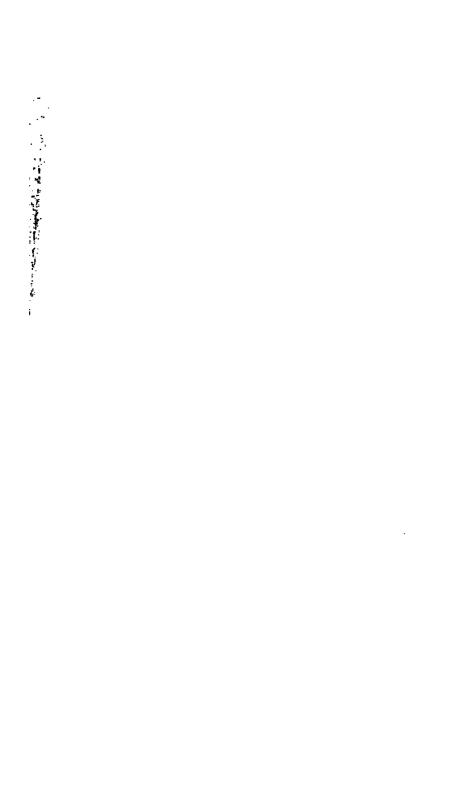
1917. Letters from America cease for six months. Mr. Chester worried. At last a letter from New York. Raby may leave school at the end of the summer term. She may do any form of unpaid war work anywhere that the Chesters approve. Vereker's lawyers will pay her fifty pounds every quarter and she must manage to live on that and keep herself in clothes. It is all he can afford.

"I'm too selfish and too lazy and too old and too

206 THE LAST OF THE DYNASTY

ill to do anything, myself," he writes, "so you must work for both of us. Now that America has hurled herself into the press—good journalese that!—it's about as uncomfortable here as with you, I expect. I wonder if Jamaica would be fairly peaceful for the winter."

PART III CHUMLEIGH GRAY



CHAPTER XXI

1918

"I saw you had a letter from Raby, Mother. What does she say? Don't you think it's very risky letting her go and live alone with Lulu? Both of them so young, and out all day. I should have thought a good boarding house would have been much safer."

"They had practically fixed it up between them before they consulted us, after the manner of young people. Lulu had this maisonette, and must take a P.G. to share it, and you know it has always been the desire of Raby's heart to live with Lulu and work when she left school. It is by far the happiest arrangement for her. A girl working in a hospital can't fit in with meals and regulations in a boarding-house—why, she has got to get up at half-past five."

"How you could, all of you, let her go to London at all is a mystery. Look at the dreadful raids! She would have been far safer down here. Why, the Chesters would have gladly taken her. Mrs.

Chester told me so."

"Yes: but she also said that Raby ought to have her chance of doing real work, right away from all of us. Agnes is never selfish. It's just because she and Jim could have found a thousand uses for her that they smoothed the way for her to go."

CHUMLEIGH GRAY 210

"It was you who found that hospital for her, anyhow. You know vou did. And I can't understand why you did it."

Gran and Cicely were making swabs, and it was

nearly bed-time.

"It's quite simple," Gran said. "Just as Raby was leaving school Jane Walton wrote asking me if I could find her an extra V.A.D. who was young and strong and not worn out by years of slaving, who was not an emotional fool, and, most important of all, could live out-for they hadn't a corner in the hospital and were all worked to death. Well, there was Raby dying to go and live with Lulu and work in London. It all fitted in perfectly."

"I don't think I should mind so much," Cich said, slowly, "if it wasn't that the War Office in London and Austin is at the War Office. And in tanglement between Austin and Raby would be sa

dreadful."

"London's a big place, Cicely. It doesn't follow that they'll see much of each other. I fancy that Austin takes his relaxation in exalted circles where hard-worked V.A.D.s, without relations in high

places, don't penetrate much."

Cicely laid a finished swab on the table and leant across it. "Mother," she said, earnestly, "I've never told you, but I saw something last summer that worried me dreadfully. You remember, when Austin came down at the end of August-when Raby was at the Chesters' just before she went to London?"

"Perfectly. I also remember that he only went over there once—for tea, with you one afternoon."

"That's it," and Cicely lowered her voice almost to a whisper. "I was going into the library to get some lists from Raby that I had to take back-you 1918 211

know the big screen round the door? Well, the door was open, and it was stormy and dark, and just as I came round I saw Austin take her in his arms and kiss her! I didn't go in."

"Bless me!" Gran exclaimed. "I didn't think he

had it in him. And did she let him?"

"She did," Cicely said, grimly. "You mayn't have noticed, but he was distinctly attracted. Austin! It would be so dreadful if there was any sort of engagement."

"Dreadful for Austin or dreadful for Raby?"

"For Amstin, of course. Why, she's so young and no money. At least, no certain money. With that wful father you never know what may happen. He marry someone as dreadful as himself... or anything. What is he doing all this time? Why does he stay away over in America?"

"For one thing, I understand he likes the climate,

he has friends there . . ."

"He can't care twopence about his daughter."

"Jim Chester says it's partly because he does care comething about his daughter that he stays away. He seems incapable of amending his life, poor man, to he keeps out of the way not to spoil hers."

"That's as it may be, but it only accentuates the fact that Raby is a shocking detrimental. And for a young man who has got on as Austin has got on, she's not at all suited to be his wife. He is so clever, so 'in' with all sorts of influential people. He ought

to marry money and position."

"Oh, he is clever enough, no one could deny it, but he has also been extremely lucky. A slight wound, early in the war, a nervous breakdown and then this staff job at home for the last eighteen months. But I shouldn't worry if I were you. It's

early days to talk of wives. I hope Raby will be far too busy to think of being anyone's wife—till the war's over, anyway. Besides, I can't see that any young man is to be pitied, who gets Raby to marry

him. You see, I happen to be fond of her."

"I'm fond of her, too; I think she's a very nice girl in lots of ways, and Frank likes her. He often asks about her in his letters. He prepared her for confirmation, you know. He had all the candidates from that house, and he said she asked the most extraordinary questions. But I'm sure he'd be the first to agree with me as to her absolute unsuitability for Austin."

"My dear child, I think you take the whole thing far too seriously. Did Austin say anything to you?"

"Of course not. He didn't know I'd seen them."

"I shouldn't tell Frank about it if I were you. It was probably only a passing impulse on both their parts."

"A passing impulse, Mother, for a young man to kiss anyone like that! What are things coming to?

Do you mean to say you approve?"

Gran looked at Cicely's shocked face with considerable amusement: "Just now there's too much tension and excitement and strain everywhere, to go about disapproving. Cheer up, Jane Walton says Raby is a capital V.A.D., and if she's under Jane

she is frightfully busy."

"They're none of them ever too busy to flirt;" Cicely said, gloomily, "and you may depend that's why Raby was so keen to go and live with Lulu. It's different for Lulu. She has to earn her own living, and it's very clever for her to be secretary in that Ministry and earn four guineas a week—most creditable."

"Well, and isn't it creditable that Raby should work all day, too, without earning anything at all?"

"Oh, it isn't the work she's gone for. She could have done that here, perfectly well. The one idea of the modern girl is to get away from home and be independent; to go to London. Then she can spend all her spare time 'cheering up the boys' as they call it. Making them spend all their money on theatres, and dinners and restaurants, and dances at goodness knows where, and tearing about in taxis. You know perfectly well the sort of thing that goes on—and yet you can sit there and take their part."

"If they do their work, and I don't think even their severest critics deny that, I can't see why they shouldn't have a little fun thrown in. And as for the

boys, surely they do need cheering up."

"What's the result of it all? War marriages, dreadful divorces, war babies and all the terrible things one hears. I'm thankful Nancy is still a child.

I couldn't bear her to be like those girls."

For nearly three years Frank Shaw had been a chaplain in France. Wounded twice, his nerves had never given out. He was not so highly strung as Austin, and no power on earth could keep him at home. Long ago Cicely had given up to his substitute their pleasant vicarage at Hamchester, and when the people who had taken Little Leadon for two years departed, Gran went back there and Cicely and the children joined her. Gran worked most of the day at the Casterly hospital. Cicely ran the house and the children with such poor aid as the war had left them, and did endless work for the Red Cross as well.

That night, when she had gone to bed, Gran took out a letter from Raby that had come that afternoon

and read it again. Cicely's revelations had considerably disturbed her.

12A, WELCHESTER STREET, W. February 22nd, 1918.

DEAREST GRAN,

Lulu is dining with Pinkie and going to "The Boy," so I'm having a quiet evening and going to bed early. I've been quite a lot in the wards lately and it's much more interesting than the eternal washing up and polishing. Sometime I wish you'd tell me what you think about presents. From men to girls, I mean. We do seem to get such a lot, at least Lulu does. I've not had much yet except chocolates and theatre tickets and sometimes flowers or a book, but then I benefit by Lulu's, so I suppose I take them too. She says it's much better they should spend their money on us than on chorus girls, but I'm not sure. Perhaps chorus girls are just as hungry sometimes for a good dinner. Lulu says we're such a much better influence, but again I wonder are we? I don't see we influence them anyway except to play about. I'm sure I don't. Lulu may, because she's so sweet. But I've wandered from the presents. Well, nearly all the flat is presents. "Furnishing on the gift system" Austin calls it. And when one comes to think of it nearly everything in the flat was given us by somebody. Mr. Chester gave me my bed and you gave me blankets and sheets. Poor Lulu hadn't a bed at all when we started and slept on rugs, but now she's got the one Pinkie had in Belgium. He doesn't want it as he's got another in Mespot. He gave Lulu the dinner service because we had only five plates and he hated having to wash up in the middle of a meal. He gave he chesterfield, too, because he said the chairs were o uncomfortable. So they were. It's a ripping hesterfield. Then Winkle, that nice boy with the nee, gave Lulu the tea-set because we had only two ups. The char broke two. I've hired a chest of lrawers, it's so tiresome to keep everything in boxes. Three-and-six a week it is, very dear, a horrid thing vith drawers that stick half-way, but I don't need nany clothes, being in uniform. Lulu says her bed s rather cold and I feel a pig in mine, but Mr. Chester said I must sleep comfortably else I couldn't lo my work, and that would be cheating the hospital. Perhaps someone else will give Lulu a proper bed. Last week I was on night duty, so then Lulu could nave my bed. We've had to get rid of our char. She stole like anything. Lulu was afraid to speak to her lest we shouldn't get another, they are so scarce. But when it came to two new crêpe de chine blouses and a pink pearl brooch—mine, vanishing in one ifternoon, I bearded her when I got back from night luty and told her firmly in a bullying tone that she nust return them instantly or I'd send for the police. She was much surprised, we've always been so meek and she hadn't seen much of me, but she cried and alked about her sick husband and brought them back and some of Lulu's things too. Thank heaven she hadn't ever worn my blouses.

"We've got another—charwoman not blouse—spavined, poor thing, and a bit of a roarer, but so far we haven't missed anything. Oh, and that Mrs. Joss took our only aluminum saucepan. We never got that back. Now please say what you think about the presents because I'd like to be prepared in my nind lest people want to give me presents to beautify the flat. They haven't offered to yet—but they

might, and if so, do you think I should accept it? A wardrobe now with a long glass where you can see yourself all the way down would be a boon. There's a rich American over on leave just now. He came with an introduction to Lulu, but he seems to like me best. I don't know why it is, but lately some of the things Father used to say have come back to me. He did strip all the clothes off one's pretences, didn't he? When I tried to feel I was a good influence—there he was! and I knew.

"We had a tea party last Sunday. Pinkie and Winkle and that girl Myrtle Ray who is so pretty and looks so awfully ill. Lulu says she has a lurid past, poor thing. Everyone is awfully kind to her but if I were she I shouldn't like being sympathised with quite so much. Lulu explains her to everybody lest they should say things to hurt her. I'd run the risk of being hurt if it was me. Austin came, too, very superior in red tabs.

Good-night dear Gran and lots of love from RABY.

Gran was very tired, but before she went to bed she wrote to Raby.

LITTLE LEADON,

CASTERLY,

February 23rd, 1918.

DEAR CHILD,

This is not a proper answer to your delightfully long letter. It is only to say that I feel great diffidence in giving an opinion on the receiving of presents because it is so individual a thing. It certainly is a joy to give them, and one hesitates to spoil anyone's pleasure. To me, the whole thing is a

ruestion of how much you like the donors; and in order to receive happily we must like them very much. Perhaps rather more than merely like before we are ible to accept. If we feel that such acceptance lays as under an obligation, then, I venture to think we don't like them guite enough; and therefore should be chary of accepting. I don't refer to such things as theatre tickets or dinners. I am quite sure you are perfectly capable of deciding such a question as this for yourself. You mention your father—don't you think that so long as you are dependent upon him, as vou still are financially, you owe a little consideration to what you think his wishes might be. I have an idea myself that they would be quite definite. Now I must go to bed. Don't sit up late too often and be sure you take proper sleep in the day, when you're on night duty.

Love from us all. Your affectionate

GRAN.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF WAR

NUMBER 12A, Welchester Street is one of those short streets that lie between Marylebone Road and Baker Street. It is narrow, gloomy, has only about twenty houses, and these are small. The rooms in them are the shape of a tall biscuit tin, higher than they are wide; and there are no cupboards, for the walls are thin. Lulu and Raby had the two upper floors, consisting of a minute kitchen with a gas stove, a sitting-room, two bedrooms, and a tiny bath-room with fixed basin, and a geyser. This always gave Raby something of the feeling with which out hunting she had negotiated a thick hedge, having no idea what sort of drop was on the other side. For a long time, whenever she lit it, her knees always closed tightly on an imaginary saddle.

The landlord had done up the flat for Lulu: it had plain distempered walls, white paint, and electric light placed, as electric light generally is placed by landlords, on walls where it gave least illumination. The rent was a hundred a year, therefore the sharing friend had to pay a pound a week, half the housekeeping, and provide her own bedroom furniture.

Lulu had been in it a year when Raby joined her in the September of 1917. Various girls had shared with her during that first year but none of them quite "fitted in" as Raby did, who glorified in their joint establishment. It was, they told you, "so central, so quiet, so easy to find and"—climax of this crescendo of advantages—"it was W!" Raby's hospital was little more than a mile away and she could walk to and fro.

There was only one shop in Welchester Street, a hairdresser's, next door to 12A. The hairdresser possessed a telephone and was of an accommodating disposition, would take messages for the girls, and allowed them to use it on payment of the calls. In consideration of these benefits they let him shampoo their hair and bought hairpins and side-combs from him. Horribly expensive hairpins, that they could have got for a third of the price in Oxford Street.

One reason why Raby suited her hostess so well was that she was ready to bear any amount of discomfort in order to be with Lulu; another, that she looked upon the discomforts as a joke, as a sort of Robinson Crusoe adventure. It was all so entirely new to her. London itself was new, for she had never even stayed there in her life before.

The sketchy housekeeping was for her as a game played by children in a dolls' house. The change from an existence sheltered, ordered and regular, to one in which the hours spent out of hospital were full of chance and freedom, was as the first spreading of wings to a young bird. Jane Walton, Commandant of the West London War Hospital, was a martinet. She exacted the last fraction of every ounce of work from her subordinates, but she saw to it that their meals in hospital were as plentiful and well-served as the meagre rationing would allow. So that on day duty, at all events, Raby was always sure of some proper meals. Gran had this in mind when she furthered the Welchester Street scheme.

Lulu at twenty-three was perhaps not quite so pretty as the wild-rose-tinted Lulu of eighteen, but what she had lost in delicacy of colouring she had gained in poise, grace, and charm of manner. She was always well-dressed, picturesque and attractive; and nearly always gay. She was a competent and dependable secretary, keen on her job and popular with her chief and with the other women clerks. After her training she had graduated in a business house in the City, and when the war started found it an easy matter to get and keep a good Government post.

Her hours were long, but her chief was liberal as to the time allowed for luncheon. The Carlton was not far from the Ministry and she was able to count on lunching there about three times a week with one of her innumerable men friends. This was a distinct saving.

Her adorers were so numerous. Raby soon found that it was almost impossible to mention any young man of whom she did not say—with a delicate droop of the head and a soft sigh—"He wanted to marry me, poor dear,—but we're still quite good friends."

The only man of their mutual acquaintance who, so far, had shown no desire to marry Lulu, or even to flirt with her, was Austin, and he had known her for years.

At first, Raby thrilled at these romantic revelations, feeling she was honoured above all others by such confidences. But, by degrees, familiarity with the formula excited quite a different emotion. Six months' constant association with Lulu had altered her purview. She was her father's daughter inasmuch as she was sharp-sighted and as a rule saw straight. She was just as fond of Lulu—for indeed

that fascinating young person was loveable and most easy to live with—but she no longer set her on a pedestal.

In Lulu's circle, too, she came upon quite a new attitude towards the war.

At school everybody took it most seriously. The girls were all imbued with the idea of service, continual service, and yet more service, till the end, towards which they worked, should be accomplished.

All her friends at Casterly were absorbed in the

hospital there or their belongings at the front.

Lulu and her friends, while deploring the casualty lists—Lulu herself never read the papers, she said she saw all she wanted on the hoardings—yet looked upon the war as an excellent reason for an amount of lunching, theatre-going, dancing and dining which certainly would not have come their way without it.

Raids were horrid; food was horrid and excessively dear when you had to buy it yourself; getting about was horrid and extremely difficult on one's own, with buses and tubes so crowded. All the more reason then for cultivating people who were proud to take you in taxis. "My unpaid war work," Lulu would say, in her most mellifluous tones, "is cheering people up."

Pinkie represented a portion of this work. A brown-faced, brown-eyed captain of a Line Regiment, who had sampled nearly all the diseases going in Mesopotamia during the last three years; had nearly died quite a number of times and was, at last, granted a long leave, which he spent mostly in London dangling after Lulu.

He was twenty-eight and his real name was Charles Blythe Pinkerton. This, Lulu and her friends declared to be quite impossibly priggish. So, as Christian names, preferably abbreviations, were the fashion among them, he alacritously answered to "Pinkie." He had a home and "people" somewhere on the south coast and he visited them occasionally. Most of the young people who frequented 12A seemed to Raby even more destitute of belongings than she was herself. If they did possess them they were uncongenial. In any case they seldom counted.

Raby liked Pinkie. He was so helpful, always ready to make toast, boil kettles or carry coals into the sitting-room, and he always came to share any raids with them. She liked all Lulu's men friends. For Lulu's taste, if catholic, was sound. They were gentlemen. She never encouraged bounders. She even drew the line at rich bounders. Her appeal, however, seemed almost universal.

Raby, hugging her own little secret in her heart of hearts, wondered how on earth Lulu did it. It was "the thing" just then to be more or less in love with somebody, and to discuss him and your own sensations with all your friends.

The first part of the programme Raby had performed with ease. The second was, to her, impossible.

And that was where her charm for Austin came in. He knew that never by glance or hint or implication would she give him away to anybody till the time came, if it ever came, when things were absolutely settled between them. And though he was certainly more in love with Raby than he had been with anybody yet, he was not at all sure that he wanted things so settled.

Unlike Lulu, she could never say, even to herself, "He wanted to marry me." Yet another of Lulu's favourite phrases was only too applicable: "I care

or him more than a little." Lulu at twenty-three ad said this to and of quite a number of ardent spirants. Raby hid her feelings in her heart and lidn't even show much of them to Austin himself, lest he should seem to make any sort of claim upon him.

For the last three years she had met him at least luring one holidays. He had always treated her with deferent sort of intimacy curiously flattering to a rirl of her temperament. On the afternoon at the nd of August that so weighed on Cicely's mind Raby had left the others in the garden and gone to he deserted library to copy the cook's lists for the Casterly tradesmen to send back with Cicely. Austin ame into the room. Her head was bent over her vork and she was writing slowly, in round, carefully egible script. She hadn't, he thought, altered so very much in appearance since the first time he saw ter in Gran's garden, drenched with water and green vith weeds. A little taller, perhaps, and certainly hinner, and now her long thick hair was coiled at the ack. How brown she was from much working in garden and farm. How thick and dark her eyeashes were. How level the sweep of her narrow, harply marked eyebrows. Suddenly an intolerable hought assailed Austin. He might lose her in London. Some other fellow might get her. Her, uis Raby.

He wasn't sure that he wanted to marry her, but to was poignantly certain that he couldn't stand the hought of any other chap playing round.

He hated the idea of her being with Lulu, unruarded, free, in that Comus rout of reckless youth.

He stood away from her in the middle of the room ooking at her. It was a gloomy, heavy afternoon, with growling thunder and a threat of rain.

"Raby, come here," he said.

"I must finish these," she answered, without raising her head. "They've got to go back with you, and if you want to be really useful you'll see that they're taken round to the shops as early as possible tomorrow morning, then the good folks will catch the carrier. We want both the horses for carting."

"Raby, come here," he said again.

She looked up, startled by something in his tone,

and rose hastily.

"Is there bad news?" she asked, anxiously, as she went to him. "Oh, don't say it's another of the boys!"

"No, no, nothing of that sort. Only . . . I want you to remember . . . that I'm going to look after you in London."

"Me! As well as the war," she said, lightly.

"You will have your hands full."

She was close to him. He put both hands on her shoulders, so warm and living beneath the thin blouse.

"You might get into mischief, you know-and

you mustn't, my dear, my dear."

His hands tightened on her shoulders. Her eyes were nearly on a level with his own. Sweet, wondering, questioning eyes.

"Promise me you won't," he whispered.

It grew darker. Thunder growled again and there was a first spatter of heavy drops of rain outside.

Her face was pale under the tan. Her eyes dim. He took her unresisting in his arms and kissed her again and again.

A louder spatter of rain drowned Cicely's depart-

ing steps.

"We'll keep this to ourselves," Austin whispered,

with his cheek against her hair. "We don't want a lot of talk and worry till things are more settled. But you do care, don't you?"

Raby had just got back from the hospital when Pinkie arrived. Lulu had not yet returned from the Ministry. He looked very tired and ill and Raby made tea, forbidding him to help her.

When Lulu came back Raby would retire to her own room till they got dinner together, or one or both went out for it. At the very first Lulu had plainly stated that she expected this, when any "special friend" came. She was ready to do the same for Raby.

Pinkie had brought a great sheaf of forced daffodils for Lulu and a flat parcel that looked, Raby thought, like stockings. Pinkie drank his tea thirstily.

"Look here, Raby," he said, "tell me honestly what sort of a chance you think I have. Does she care at all or doesn't she?"

"I've given up trying to understand Lulu in these things," she said, cautiously. "She's quite honest with you. She's never promised anything. Now, has she?"

"She has and she hasn't. She knows how I feel. She seems to like me to be with her, and surely she wouldn't allow me to be with her so much if she didn't like me a bit—now, would she?"

He looked so grey and miserable. Raby's heart was wrung for him.

"What has upset you, Pinkie?" she said, gently. "Is it fever again?"

"It's always fever," he groaned, "but not the sort you mean. It's just this—I'm getting to the end of

my tether. Who's that chap Gray she was lunching with today?"

"Gray," she repeated. "I don't think I've

heard of him. He must be a new one."

"He's a very old one, I fancy," Pinkie said, bitterly. "He's just back from Egypt or Basra or somewhere: got six months' leave, confounded fellow."

"Well, you've had nearly six months' leave

yourself."

"That's it. I shall soon be going back and nothing settled. If she turns me down, Raby, I don't care how soon I'm settled once for all."

"Now that's silly," she said, severely. "You know perfectly well what Lulu is. . . . She doesn't

want anything definite."

"But she must decide something definite some time. . . . She's told me she's fond of me. If I weren't so seedy and nervous I believe I could pull it off."

"You flutter round her like a moth round a candle. It isn't the candle's fault if the moth gets burnt. It's no use complaining she won't be definite. She never is definite."

"She's told you she's fond of me, hasn't she?" Pinkie's haggard eyes were most beseeching.

"She's fond of you all," Raby said, slowly, "but . . ."

A key grated in the lock of the front door. All sounds in the flat were extremely audible. Before Raby could finish her sentence Lulu came in, followed by a tall man who looked, Raby thought, more ill than any of the men in hospital. Thin to emaciation, his hands were almost transparent. Hollow eyed, with cheek-bones sharply defined under the yellow skin. He had an exceedingly firm jaw, grey

hair, heavy eyebrows and large young eyes that belied his elderly hair. Even Pinkie looked almost robust beside him.

It was plain that he and Lulu were mutually stirred by some strong emotion. The introductions over, Pinkie settled himself firmly in his chair (literally his chair, for he had presented it to the flat the day before), evidently determined to sit out Colonel Gray.

The atmosphere was so electric that when the door bell trilled Raby flew to open it, thankful to get out of the room.

Austin was there. "Hurry up and change," he said. "I've got tickets for the Coliseum and a table at the Carlton Grill—didn't Lulu tell you? I met her in Prince's this morning and she said she knew you could come."

"Things seem pretty hectic at 12A tonight," Austin said, when they had got a taxi. "It strikes me Lulu is getting her affairs into a bit of a tangle."

"Austin, who is this Colonel Gray?"

"My dear girl, where have you been living? Chumleigh Gray is a very well-known person. A great traveller, and a wonderful linguist. Why, he knows more about queer, out-of-the-way places in Central Africa and Persia than almost anyone else just now: certainly more than anyone of his age, he can't be much over thirty. He was somewhere at the back-of-beyond when war broke out, didn't even hear there was a war till it had been going for about two months. Then he trekked back and offered himself, and of course they jumped at him."

"Lulu has never spoken of him at all."

"That does surprise me. Didn't she tell you 'he wanted to marry her,' like all the rest of us?"

"Well, she couldn't—though it doesn't follow that she wouldn't. But I've never worshipped at her shrine. I like my fruit fresh, not handled."

He put his arm round her as he spoke, but she drew away from him: "That's a horrid thing to say—and

it's not true. Austin."

"It is true—to a certain extent. When a girl for several years has been kissed by Tom, Dick, and Harry, or whoever the adorer happens to be, she is handled."

"You don't know Lulu is kissed like that—you've no right to say it. I don't like you when you talk

that way—it hurts."

"Don't be a goose. You, who pride yourself on facing facts, can't have lived all these months with Lulu and be blind to what goes on under your very eyes. Mind, I don't say there's any harm in it. She's far too cold ever to get into real mischief—yet in a way she always makes one think of Rossetti's poem,

'Lazy, laughing, languid Jenny, Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea.'

Only in her case it's what the guinea buys she likes; I doubt if she'd take the actual cash."

"I wish you and Lulu didn't dislike each other so."
"I don't dislike her. I think she's very charming,

but I shouldn't like it at all if you . . . "

Austin paused. "If I what?"

"Well, if she influenced you. If you suddenly started to have the same easy-going standards. She's all right—if I thought there was any danger of her coming a real cropper like that girl Myrtle Ray I wouldn't let you stop there a minute."

The taxi had got into a block in Piccadilly and was standing still.

"If she was in trouble ever," she said, "nobody

should take me away from her, not even you."

"We'd see about that . . . but I'm not afraid—for Lulu."

"Are you afraid for me?"

"Sometimes I'm afraid for both of us."

"Austin, is that Colonel Gray any relation to Mrs. Underwood? I seem to have heard something once

about a travelling nephew."

"Of course, that's the one. I think Lulu's chief attraction for him is she looks so delightfully feminine, and he pictures her sitting in the opening of a tent in the desert making crêpe-de-chine chemises, when he returns from an expedition. I don't see Lulu sitting anywhere for long where there was only one man. He was home for a fortnight last year, met her somewhere and made tremendous running: but, as usual, nothing was settled. But she'd better be careful. He's not an amiable ass like Pinkie and would be a handful for any girl: a stormy sort of chap, always hearing 'the call of the wild' and all that sort of thing. Yet he's just the sort of fellow who might whisk her off in a whirlwind of excitement into marriage, and divorce her a few months afterwards. He'd stand no nonsense after he was married, I can tell you."

The taxi began to move. "Perhaps," Raby said, "she really cares for him. He's so . . . unusual."

"When Lulu 'really cares' for anybody, I shall believe in the millennium. Here we are at last."

At dinner she said, "I'd like to read that poem of Rossetti's. It's not Christina, is it? We had that at school."

"No; it's certainly not Christina. I'll get the book for you, only you mustn't think I suggest that Lulu in the least resembles the lady of the poem—she doesn't. That poor Jenny was much more . . . generous. Not the sort of person one talks about."

"One talks about everything and everybody. Life is extraordinarily interesting, don't you think? It's a very exciting sort of time to be living. I'm so glad I was born only nineteen years ago instead of ninety. Listen, Austin, if that Colonel Gray is in love with Lulu because she seems so feminine and domestic, he's perfectly right. She is feminine and domestic; always gentle; if people are cross she is never cross back—not to any of us. She never swears like some of them—you should hear them in hospital or the canteens—the girls I mean, not the men. She's just as nice to other girls as she is to men."

"Lulu's all right, but she is too fond of philan-

dering."

"I suppose we're all fond of philandering."

"Really, Raby, I hoped you looked on the feeling we have for one another as something rather different from that."

"But it is philandering, Austin; why should we face facts about Lulu and not about ourselves?"

"You may look upon it in that light, I don't."

"You are a dear," Raby whispered.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WEB

COLONEL GRAY's appearances were brief and meteoric. He had only ninety-six hours' leave and most of that had to be spent in important interviews. The brief portion he could spare he spent with Lulu, and Lulu's usual chilly sweetness was thawed to a tremulous warmth that Raby had never before seen in her.

Things were going badly in France and Belgium, and our people were pushed back and back. Easter Day fell on the thirty-first of March, cold and clear. As Raby went her way to the hospital people were hurrying to the churches for the six o'clock service. The hospital was full. There were many bad cases and they were short-handed. Everyone was tired and discouraged and desperately anxious. All leave was cancelled and troops were pouring into London that week.

A girl Raby knew worked in the canteen at Charing Cross, and sometimes after her day in hospital she went down to lend a hand. She never promised to go, for she was not sure of getting off.

On the Thursday in Easter week a V.A.D., who had been sick, returned; and Raby got away rather earlier than usual. It was a cold, miserable afternoon of pouring rain, and when she got to Baker

Street she was sorely tempted to go straight back to the flat and curl up on Pinkie's sofa till Lulu came in. But something seemed to drive her to Charing Cross.

Who was she to rest when our men over there were having such a dreadful time? She managed to squeeze into a bus and stand, so she got to the station fairly dry. There was the usual pandemonium of khaki, crowd, smells and general confusion: and as she paused for a minute to look at it she noticed a little old couple who stood clutching their queerlyshaped baggage, and clinging together, as though marooned by the surging human tide around them. Their backs were towards her and there was something about those backs that simply shouted "country." The little old man wore breeches, neat boxcloth gaiters, and a bunchy covert coat. Horse was writ large all over him, and her heart warmed towards him. Poor puzzled dears. She'd see what she could do.

She pushed through the crowd and as she reached them she knew why she had come to Charing Cross that day: for it was Bates!

Bates and Mrs. Bates. The squarest, most misfitting little pegs that ever were thrust into a round abyss of bewilderment.

She hadn't seen him for five years, though she still wrote to him occasionally and he always answered.

She had never wavered in her affection for him: and what she had, so far, seen of life, gave her no cause to change her opinion of his wisdom and his goodness.

For a minute she stood close beside them, drinking in the quaint, neat, homely little figures that had belonged to a comfortable, easy world, so different from this.

Then she touched him gently on the arm.

"Bates," she said, "why didn't you tell me you were coming to London?"

He dropped his nubbly bag, stared at her, and touched his hat. "Why, it ain't never our Miss

Raby?" he cried.

What a shaking hands there was! Mrs. Bates shed a few tears, not from joy at beholding Raby, but in the exquisite relief of knowing that someone had dropped from the clouds who would probably be able to tell them where they could get their tickets and from what platform their train started.

Their timid enquiries so far had met with no response, "not as we could understand." It seemed they were on their way to Plumstead to stay with a married daughter, whose husband had just been recalled to his regiment, when he had only had three days of his fortnight's leave. And she was that upset she'd sent to them to come up and stay a bit.

Bates's master had allowed them to go for a week and gave them their return tickets to Paddington and all.

Raby put them on a seat in the waiting-room, and went to find out about trains for Plumstead. There wasn't one that went through for over an hour. She went and got their tickets and took one for herself as well. The train would be crammed and she felt she must go with them to see them safely there.

Tea was clearly indicated, so she took them to the Corner House, found a table, and they all sat down to wait the pleasure of the sadly overworked waitress.

Bates and Mrs. Bates drank bitter tea and ate cakes that seemed made of sawdust in a sort of dream.

Raby wondered how in the world they had ever

got across London from Paddington, and here Bates woke up: "Today, Miss Raby, have been what I do call a reg'lar lucky day. When we got to Paddin'ton there wasn't nobody as 'ud do a thing nor no-one to tell us nothing. So we went and stood outside, I daresay us looked a bit lost-like, and a gentleman come up. A general 'e was-it's them as 'as the brass ornyments on their 'ats, ain't it, Miss Raby?—an' 'e says to me, 'e says, 'Now is it 'orses or is it 'ounds, my man?' 'Tis 'ounds at present, sir,' I says, 'but it was always 'orses before this 'ere war.' 'Ah,' 'e says, 'you look after them 'ounds; we shall want 'em again presently, you bet your boots. That's your war work—you kip 'em going for us when we comes back; don't you forget us. Now where d'you want to go?' An' would you believe me, Miss Raby, 'e got porter and made 'im fetch a taxi-cab, an' 'e put us in an' 'e paid the man 'isself. An' we got 'ere. An' then you come-

"Providence," Mrs. Bates remarked piously.

"Such a beautiful tea an' all."

It seemed they had started off in a great hurry and had omitted to tell their daughter by what train they

would arrive at Paddington.

"We didn't want 'er comin' in for to meet us. She's not over strong just now and all this pushin' an' scrougin's too much for the likes of 'er. An' 'ow does London suit you, Miss Raby? I suppose you don't get no ridin' these days? Terrible war this is, to be sure. Do you think as they'll get to Calais with that there big Bertie as they say could shell London?"

By means of much "pushin' an' scrougin' " Raby got them into a carriage and Mrs. Bates into a seat. She and Bates stood on other people's toes in the

gangway till they had passed New Cross. Then they, too, squeezed into seats and other people stood on their toes. It was getting dark when they reached Plumstead and it was with relief that Raby discovered their destination was not far from the station.

She took them to the very door, saw them safely in, and left them.

It took her two hours and a half to get back to the flat, and it was nine o'clock when she reached it.

Lulu was sitting by the fire, making a blouse. "My dear, wherever have you been? Austin came in about half an hour ago and of course I couldn't tell him anything about you. He was distinctly stuffy. He seemed to think I was hiding something."

Raby sank exhausted on the other end of Pinkie's sofa. "I'm sorry, but I met some old servants of my father's going to Plumstead. I simply had to help them, they were so bewildered. They don't know London at all and everything is so muddly just now. Is there anything to eat?"

"Not much, I'm afraid, but I'll get what there is." Lulu rose good-naturedly: "You stay there till it's

ready, you poor wreck."

The little sitting-room looked so pretty in the warm fire-light—Lulu economically switched off the light as she left the room—there were pink tulips growing in a big green bowl, and freesias in a vase. How quiet and scented and warm it was. Raby lay back luxuriously against the cushions, her muddy boots thrust out towards the fire. How lucky she was to live with Lulu instead of in some horrid boarding house.

"Supper," Lulu called. "I've boiled the last of the Casterly eggs and there is some margarine."

Raby went into the kitchen for her supper and Lulu

perched on the other end of the little table, for there was only one chair.

Back in the sitting-room again Lulu took of Raby's wet boots for her, and made her lie full length on the sofa: while she, leaning against it, sat on the floor with her sewing. Raby was so tired that she was more than half asleep when she heard Lulu say, "I think you ought to tell me whether there really is anything between you and Austin or not. I'm quite frank and honest with you. Do you think it's fair never to tell me a thing?"

"There's nothing to tell," Raby mumbled.

"That's nonsense," Lulu said decidedly. "I've known Austin now for ten years, and I can judge when he's attracted and when he isn't. Tell the truth now, Raby. Hasn't he asked you to marry him?"

"Never!" Raby exclaimed with energy. "Never in the least!"

"Then," Lulu said, seriously, "I don't think him at all honourable. And I don't think you ought to go about with him as you do."

Raby said nothing. There seemed nothing to say. "You're very young, you know," Lulu continued, "and I feel a certain responsibility——"

Raby laughed. "Dear old thing, you needn't, I assure you. What about you? Is it honourable to go about with a man that you know wants to marry you, and whom you have no intention of marrying? What about Winkle? What about Pinkie?"

"Pinkie was most unkind and unreasonable. He insisted on quarrelling. I was quite ready to be friends. I am fond of him, but not in that way. Besides, I think that the very fact of a man wanting

to marry you... sort of regularises the situation, makes it straight. I may be mid-Victorian," Lulu said, with a sigh, "but that's how I feel."

"Straight for who?" Raby asked, ungrammatic-

ally, "you or him?"

"For both of us," Lulu answered with gentle dignity. "I shouldn't dream of being really friendly with any man unless I was sure of that."

"It seems to me a very one-sided arrangement,"

Raby said, musingly.

"One can't be too careful in these days."

"I shouldn't say you were particularly careful,"

Raby remarked.

"I'm most careful of the sort of man I go about with. You can judge. Aren't they all thoroughly nice?"

"Lulu, tell me, are you in love with that Colonel

Gray?"

Lulu dropped her work and looked into the fire. "Sometimes I am—awfully. When he's here he sort of sweeps me away with him. I don't know how to describe it. He can make me do what he likes: but when he's gone then I'm afraid. Oh, dear," sighed Lulu, "it's all very difficult."

CHAPTER XXIV

INCOMPATIBILITY

SOCIALLY Austin was a great success. His quiet, caustic, incisive way of talking, his good looks, his grasp of detail and happy knack of placating those who were opposed to him in opinion: all these qualities combined to recommend him to certain well-known ladies who ran the more flamboyant war charities.

He was known in his official capacity as a young man who could keep his own counsel, and he was a hard and intelligent worker.

He would tell the great ladies, and some of the lesser ladies, too, tit-bits of official news (when they were already public property) in such a confidential fashion as assured his listeners they were getting, at first hand, things they had no possible right to know. This added a zest to his society and he was much in demand.

He was abstemious, careful of his health and of his money. His amusements cost him very little for he was asked out a great deal.

Towards the end of June he awoke to the fact that he had neither seen nor heard anything of Raby for three weeks. He never wrote to her, except the merest notes suggesting a dinner or a theatre; and beyond her reply to such invitations—and that often by telephone—she never wrote to him.

That was the queer thing about her. She de-

manded nothing. It was a quality unusual in so young a girl, and he admired it and found it vastly convenient.

At the same time it was irritating.

He felt that she ought to keep him informed as to her movements. One never knew what might be going on in that frivolous little flat; and he felt responsible—heaven knows to whom—for her behaviour. At any moment she might be swept into the vortex of Lulu's flirtations and start one on her own account.

She was not commonplace. Her appeal, he reflected, complacently, was not of the facile type. There was something fresh and simple and sincere about her, yet she was no mere bread-and-butter miss, entirely ignorant of life. She came of generations of people who, good or bad, were yet always entirely sure of themselves and their position.

Thoroughly democratic in his views, Austin yet possessed, deep hidden in his soul, a very genuine respect for Race. He knew all about the Verdons. He had made it his business to find out about Markways. It was an historic house. There were fine pictures, heirlooms, which the disreputable Vereker could not touch.

Her two cousins were both on the Western Front: what if they were both killed?

Would their father, in spite of his quarrel with Vereker, agree to break the entail in favour of Raby, if it was agreed that, in the event of her marriage, her husband should take the name of Verdon? So far as he could discover there were no other Verdons. Vereker's married sister had no children.

Only occasionally did Austin allow his thoughts to stray down such unprofitable paths.

Lately he had seen a great deal of Lady Lettice Thorpe, who was in the forefront of every movement, whether medical, musical or dramatic. Moreover, her father, Lord Riccarton, was a power possessing half-a-dozen newspapers and almost unlimited money.

"A penniless lass wi' a long pedigree" had but a poor chance in such a competition. The annoying part of it was that Raby did not compete. She made no attempt to hold him by even the slenderest thread

of exaction.

A queer girl. A girl who did things deliberately and not upon impulse. A girl you could not move if she had once made up her mind.

Obstinate perhaps, but loyal. Where she cared, it was for always. Look at her with the Chesters, with Cicely's mother, with Lulu! and about those old servants she was ridiculous. Feudalism was dead and done with and a bore, you couldn't carry on these traditions into modern life.

It was disconcerting to come up against such solidity. Disconcerting and a little tiresome.

All the same he must continue somehow to see Raby. If he had to break with her entirely he would do it decently and in a gentlemanly fashion. He wouldn't slide out like a thief in the night.

Frank Shaw came home on leave in the first week of July; and having seen him, Gran came up to her club in London for a week to let him have his wife and children to himself. She wondered whether it was the hot weather that made Raby look so pale. She felt anxious about the girl, for she was too thin and curiously listless. Therefore did Gran beg an afternoon's holiday from Jane Walton, and together she and Raby went down to Kew, to sit under the trees.

There were but few people in the gardens and they easily found a seat where it was almost as still and seaceful as in the woods at Casterly.

Raby was glad to be with Gran. There was something invigorating, and at the same time restful, in this elderly woman who had seen a great deal of varied life, but never thrust the results of her experience on those who were finding things out gradually for themselves.

"I've thought over the present question," Raby said, "though I've never mentioned it again. I haven't had any, not expensive ones, but I feel it wouldn't be honest of me if I didn't say this: the people I'd like presents from don't give them to me, and I don't want them from the others. So I don't deserve any credit at all. I'd simply adore them—however expensive they were—from the right people."

"People?" Gran repeated.

"Person, if you prefer it—but that's how it is. Do you see?"

"I see," said Gran, who saw a good deal further

than Raby imagined.

"I suppose," Gran continued, "Lulu doesn't feel

any obligation?"

"No, it's all right for her. She considers it better they should spend their money on a nice woman than on people who are . . . not so nice." Here Raby broke into one of her broad smiles and the dimple, that had almost disappeared from her thin face, suddenly twinkled. "She does love pretty things so much," she added.

"And don't you love pretty things?"

"Not like Lulu. Not lately. I don't seem to care a bit about clothes and things. I suppose it's always being in uniform. Do you know I've heard

from Father and he says he has decided to come home. I do hope he won't want to take me away from the hospital. I'd simply hate that, but I suppose I'd have to go, if he cut off supplies."

"Did he say when he was coming?"

"No, he's never exact about things like that. He loathes plans and won't be tied down to any dates. He'll just appear, I suppose, and then . . ." She opened out her hands with a hopeless gesture.

Gran turned and looked at her: "Is that what is

worrying you?"

Again Raby smiled the boyish, mischievous smile. "No," she said, "I can't truthfully say it is. Long ago I gave up worrying over Father. You see, I never was sure what he'd do or how he'd take things, and I don't suppose he has altered. I expect there'll be all sorts of rows and ructions when he comes back. But I'm not worrying in advance. He may change his mind again. He's done it a dozen times in the last three years."

"Then what is worrying you?" Gran asked.

Raby rubbed her cheek against Gran's shoulder. "Dear Gran," she said, "there really is nothing to report from the 12A, Welchester Street front."

Later on, when she was back again in Casterly, and talking to Mrs. Chester, Gran said vehemently, "It would give me great satisfaction if some particularly hefty and violent young man would quarrel with Austin Shaw."

CHAPTER XXV

CROSS CURRENTS

GENERAL SIR HARRY PINSENT, K.C.M.G., and a whole alphabet besides, met Lulu at a luncheon party in the beginning of September, and a fortnight later proposed to her. He was considerably her senior, being a well-preserved forty-five; and what she herself described as a "dear, simple soldier-man." Big, fair, and a good deal stouter than he liked.

He was an exceedingly straight man, knew what he wanted, and pressed Lulu to marry him at once and give him the right to look after her; to take her away from that infernal Ministry, and that damned uncomfortable little flat.

He appeared at a psychological moment, when she was getting just a little tired of the Ministry. The hours were so exacting, and just then London had cheered up. The news was better and there was quite a lot going on. She was also a little tired of Raby and her alarm clock; which went off every morning at 5.30 with a prolonged and shattering exuberance of clatter, very trying in so small a house. And Raby insisted that nothing less soniferous could possibly wake her. Therefore poor Lulu had to bear it, and turn over and go to sleep again, for her office hours did not start till ten.

Another thing that tried Lulu was the feeling that Raby was not quite as companionable as she used to be. They hardly ever saw one another till evening and several times lately Raby had refused to make a square party for dinner and the play, because she said she was too tired. Lulu, ever tactful, refrained from telling her that she was making a fool of herself over that disagreeable, stingy Austin Shaw. But Lulu was under no misapprehension as to the cause of Raby's apathetic attitude towards amusement. She had been keen enough on fun of every sort when she first came up to London.

Raby's candour towards herself fought with her

pride and won in a single round.

It was useless for her to tell herself that this queer depression that had settled upon her had nothing whatever to do with Austin's neglect of her.

The shrewd clear-sightedness that Lulu so disliked when it surveyed her sentimental vacillations was just as keen, and perhaps more merciless, when it was turned by Raby upon her own motives and her own actions.

Just as, when a child, she had squared her shoulders and muttered, "I suppose I can stick it"; so, now, she determined to stick it. But she wasn't capable of pretending, even to herself, that she didn't mind.

She minded horribly.

Lulu was very full of her General. He showered gifts upon her and was utterly devoted—a contrast, indeed, to poor Raby's case—all the same Lulu refused to give him a plain answer. She confessed to him with delicious tremors and gentle reticences that she had got into rather an entanglement with Colonel Gray. She hadn't exactly promised to marry him . . . but she had not forbidden him to hope, and had promised, faithfully promised, not to get engaged to anyone else till he came back.

General Pinsent "pished" and "pshawed" and cursed Chumleigh Gray up hill and down dale, but Lulu was firm. Her indecision in matters of the heart was as a rock of defence to her. Austin was perfectly right, she loved philandering: and all the pleasant things philandering brought her in its train.

Therefore did General Pinsent return to France more desperately in love than ever, and torn by

hideous jealousy at every turn.

Lulu grew prettier and prettier and before she had time to weary Chumleigh Gray (having had fever for the umpteenth time) came on a short leave, bringing his sheaves with him in the shape of more decorations.

Colonel Gray also brought rolls of silk, and amber necklaces, and wonderfully worked Egyptian tunics in which she looked utterly adorable. Oriental garments only seemed to accentuate her entirely Western fairness and lissom grace.

He refused to listen to anything about that ridiculous old General: and, as before, swept Lulu away in a gale of passionate excitement—just so far.

He told her she must write and tell the General she was engaged to him. She wrote, and being a gentleman it never occurred to Chumleigh Gray to ask to

see the letter, or even what she said.

Raby, being a girl, and knowing her Lulu, wondered how such a clever man as Colonel Gray could be so amazingly stupid.

She liked him. He was kind. He roped her in for various festivities that unaccountably cheered her up. She liked him much better than General Pinsent, who always, if Lulu let him into the flat, inquired in a stage whisper, "Is that other girl out?"

Raby was all for Colonel Gray: but Lulu used to cast up her eyes and say solemnly, "I'm afraid I'm behaving very badly to poor dear General Pinsent.

He's the best of men and most honourable, wonderful character I know . . . but Chumleigh is so compelling. He won't listen. He just over-rides me, and sort of sweeps me away. Oh dear! It's all . very difficult."

"But surely," the downright Raby would exclaim, "you must know which of them you like best; and if you do know, then you've no business to en-

courage the other one."

"There's so much," Lulu would say softly, "to be said for both of them. And I simply can't discuss it all with Chum just now. He's not well enough."

At that moment Chumleigh Gray's star seemed in

the ascendant. He was there, in London.

Austin had been giving tea at the Ritz to Lady Lettice Thorpe. It was not quite six o'clock but the light was already failing. As they strolled by Prince's there was a little crowd on the curb watching an extremely restive horse in a spring cart driven by a man who was evidently very much afraid of it. The horse was plunging and rearing and generally making itself a public nuisance, and the man sawed fiercely at the reins. Lady Lettice waited to watch, and Austin saw that a girl had gone to the horse's head accompanied by an officer in the universal khaki. The girl also was in uniform, the ugly uniform of the V.A.D. Her back was towards Austin and she was stroking the horse and talking to him, evidently trying to quiet him. Presently she succeeded. man in uniform held his head and in no time she was up on the seat beside the man, had taken the reins from him, and drove off. Then he discovered that the V.A.D. was Raby. Raby, looking thoroughly pleased with herself, and evidently giving the man a lecture on how not to drive as she drove away.

The man in uniform strolled back to the pavement and Austin recognised Chumleigh Gray.

"Good-looking girl," Lady Lettice remarked.

"Drove off as if she'd bought London."

Austin made no answer. He was shaken, stirred. This Raby that he had just seen was not the rather shabby girl he had always, lately, pictured in his mind. The Raby so thankful and pleased when he gave her twenty minutes of his valuable time. He and Lady Lettice found themselves just behind Lulu, Chumleigh Gray and another man, and he heard Chumleigh say something about Hammersmith Broadway.

Austin was not dining out that night and he decided that after dinner he'd go and look them up at the flat.

He arrived at 12A about nine o'clock and was met by sounds of hilarity and a tremendous smell of frying. Raby, out of uniform, in a blue evening frock covered by an apron, let him in.

"We're in the middle of dinner," she said. "There's some for you if you haven't had it, and if

you have you can come and see us have ours."

Chumleigh Gray, wearing an apron tied by string, as the waistband was too small, was frying mushrooms on the gas stove, and Lulu was scrambling cggs.

A bottle of champagne and grapes were on the dresser and the used plates were sitting in the sink

awaiting the morrow and the char.

Austin declined any refreshment except the champagne Chumleigh had provided—it was of a good brand—sat on a cleared space on the dresser and smoked.

The others were hungry.

"We should have finished," Lulu said, "only

Raby was so late. She lectured that poor man all the way down to his stables somewhere at the back of Hammersmith station and then she showed him the proper way to put a horse to bed. Did you hear

its prayers, Raby, and kiss it good-night?"

"He was an Irish horse and very young," Raby said, seriously, "so I didn't interfere with his religion: but I kissed him good-night—and I asked that imbecile driver if he'd let me put two fingers in the corners of his mouth, and he thought it was a game, so I did—and then I pulled—he couldn't bite me much, his teeth were so bad."

"Was he stuffy?"

"Just a bit: but I gave him a shilling and that somewhat propitiated him. And then I found I'd only got fivepence to get home, so I had to wait for a train."

"Had you your gloves on?" Austin asked,

anxiously.

"Yes: in case he bit me. I don't think he'll saw at that poor dear's mouth quite so hard next time. But how can they get men like that to drive? He was in a rope-walk all his life, he told me, till the war. Then he got tuberculous and the doctors said an openair life would be good for him, so he had a few lessons, and starts to drive a spring cart for Messrs. Wilkins and Spedding. Is there another mushroom, or have you eaten them all, Colonel Gray?"

"I saw you with Lady Lettice Thorpe this afternoon," Lulu said to Austin, adding with malicious sweetness. "Are you sure you won't have a mushroom? I should have thought you were particularly

fond of them."

Austin did not stay long. Bohemianism in any form was, to him, supremely distasteful.

Raby went with him to the door.

"Will you dine with me tomorrow?" he asked.

"I'm sorry. I can't, because I go on night duty. I get tomorrow off, till seven, and I'm supposed to sleep in the afternoon, but I don't expect I shall."

"Lunch then. Will you come to lunch? I want

to talk to you and it's impossible here."

"I'd love to come to lunch."

"The Pall Mall Restaurant then, half-past one—and please don't play the pretty horsebreaker on the way."

"That man," she said, "had even worse hands

than you, Austin."

"Such poor gifts as I possess are in my head, not in my hands. Good-night."

"Good-night, Austin."

He was gone. Raby added "dear" in a whisper and was horrified at herself because involuntarily the word "prig" followed the "dear."

Then she went straight to bed, thereby further endearing herself to Colonel Gray, who really liked

her very well already.

"Why do you always wear that everlasting uniform?" Austin asked Raby as they sat at lunch next day.

"We have to, you know, when we're on duty. I

don't wear it down at Casterly."

"I should have thought . . . occasionally . . ."

"I suppose I could, but I never thought of it."

"My dear, I wish you were down at Casterly now, for you are getting to think far too little . . . about what people may say. Yesterday afternoon, for instance, you made yourself uncommonly conspicuous."

Raby looked astonished. "It was the only thing to be done. The man couldn't drive. If you love

horses you simply can't see them tortured and terrified. Colonel Gray felt just the same. He'd have gone if I hadn't and he has only a few days more leave, and I knew he wanted to be with Lulu. None of them thought there was anything odd about it."

"Is Gray engaged to Lulu?"

"Not publicly-yet."

"Whose fault is that? Hers or his?"

"Hers of course. He would have been to see her people and had the whole thing in the papers last time he was home if she'd have let him. Why, he wanted her to get married months ago."

"What is she waiting for?"

"That, my dear, is Lulu's business. You'd better ask her."

"I don't," he drawled, "feel sufficiently interested in her spasmodic love affairs to do anything of the kind, but," he added in a different tone, "I can't help hating it that you should be mixed up with them."

"I'm not mixed up with them. We never interfere in each other's affairs. That's why we're such good friends."

Raby lit a cigarette with great deliberation. She was flushed and her eyes were bright: for suddenly, just as though someone had opened the shutters in a dark room, she saw that the conduct Austin criticised in Lulu was precisely his conduct towards herself. And he wasn't nearly so nice about it as Lulu, either.

He looked at his watch. "I have an appointment at three with Lord Riccarton. Will you walk so far along Pall Mall with me?"

When they came out into Haymarket they found it had started to rain and no ghost of a taxi with the flag up.

"What do you think?" Austin asked. "Of

course I want every minute of you I can get, but you've no umbrella. Hadn't you better go straight to the Circus and get a 'bus?"

"I don't mind rain, I'll walk with you."

In spite of the rain, which began to be heavy, Pall Mall was busy. Taxis were plying up and down but never a one for hire. Men were hurrying back from lunch to their various billets.

Outside one of the most dignified and decorous of the clubs there was evidently a disturbance of some sort, for the loafers who, apparently, spring out of the earth in London were gathered in a little crowd, and as Raby and Austin passed they saw that the club porter was expostulating with an elderly man, who was being gently but firmly propelled down its steps, while two horrified members watched the disgraceful progress through the glass doors. The intruder was swearing. Swearing with a fluency and force remarkable even in those vigorous days. He had a high-pitched, staccato cultured voice and a singularly clear enunciation. As he and his escort reached the pavement one sentence was enough for Raby. The tones were unforgettable.

Her heart seemed to stop, then jump up and turn over, and with a quick thrust into the knot of people she had left Austin's side.

Yes: it was her father. Flushed, tumbled, and dishevelled; and in a passion: but so thin and worn and old, that she would have passed him in the street had he been behaving like an ordinary mortal.

"Father," she said, right in his ear, for the street was very noisy, "what are you doing here? You must come with me."

The porter gave a gasp of relief. "If you know the gentleman, miss," he said, very civilly, "I do

hope you'll take him away. He says he's a member of the club, but I've been here two years and his name's not on the books, and," he added sympathetically, "I don't think the gentleman is quite himself."

Her father was staring at her. The porter ran up

the steps and vanished behind the glass doors.

"Raby," Vereker said slowly, "little Raby in Pall Mall all alone! What the devil do you mean by it?"

Austin hovered on the outskirts in an agony. It was nearly three o'clock and here he was in the most conspicuous part of London—where one might meet anyone—anyone!—involved in a vulgar brawl.

The disreputable father had turned up with a

vengeance.

What was to be done?

"I'm not alone, Father. Captain Shaw is with me

. . . perhaps he can get us a taxi."

"I'm getting wet, Raby," Vereker said pathetically. "The rain is trickling down my neck and I can't take you into the club. They don't allow women."

"Try and get a taxi, Austin," Raby called impatiently. "We must take him home."

"We!"

"Where are you staying, Father?" she asked, "and why didn't you tell me you'd arrived?"

She tried to get him to come with her . . . to move a few steps—anywhere away from that grinning and interested audience.

Austin appeared at her elbow. "I'll go on and see if I can send you back a taxi—I really mustn't wait—I'm awfully sorry, but it's a most important appointment. You stop here and I'll see what I can do."

Stop there!

"I'm getting very wet, Raby," Vereker said again, in the same flat, plaintive voice, entirely unlike the furious tones of a minute ago.

"Are you staying at a hotel, Father, or

where?"

"I'm in my old rooms in St. James's Place, of course . . . where else should I be?"

"Why that's quite near," she cried joyfully.

"Don't you think we might walk there?"

"Me walk in this filthy downpour! Why doesn't that idiot of a porter get us a taxi? Has everybody gone mad?"

He was working himself up to another outburst. The idlers closed in upon them joyfully. Taxis

whizzed by. The rain poured down.

Then like a chariot straight from heaven a taxi stopped at the curb. Raby was preparing to seize it. A little old gentleman, with a pink face and white whiskers, got out nimbly, turning to someone inside: "Shan't be a minute," he called, "only want to get my letters." And he tripped up the steps.

Raby was desperate. She left her father and ran up the steps after the old gentleman and caught his arm. "Sir," she exclaimed, "will you let me have your taxi? My father is . . . ill; and I can't leave him to look for one. I only want to take it to St.

James's Place. I'll send it back."

"What's that, what's that?" and the old gentleman, much startled, looked in the direction of Raby's pointing finger.

The situation jumped to the eye.

"Of course, of course," he exclaimed.

It was all done in a minute. The waiting friend, another neat old gentleman, was out on the pavement and Vereker was hustled in. As Raby was following

he held the door, asking "Can you manage? Would you like me to come with you?"

She shook her head. "I shall never forget you,"

she said, and held out her hand.

"Now, where," said the old gentleman, as he went up the steps with his friend, "have I seen that man? His face is familiar. What a tragedy! Poor girl, poor girl!"

Vereker had sunk into his corner in a sort of

stupor.

"Now, Father," Raby said firmly, "you must explain. Why didn't you tell me you were here?"

"I was coming to you," he said, still in that flat, expressionless voice. "I was coming to see you this evening. Not till evening because I thought you were safe in the hospital till then; and, instead, I find you loitering about Pall Mall with a man. It's been a great shock to me: a great shock. I thought you were so different."

Here he burst into tears and the taxi stopped. "You didn't say what number," the driver shouted.

Vereker gave the number. They went on a few doors and stopped before a tall house.

"Mind you go back for those gentlemen," she said as she paid the driver. She knocked and rang and the door was opened by Jenkins.

A different Jenkins, thinner and not so sleek as when she knew him before, but imperturbable as ever.

He took Vereker's hat, coat and gloves.

"I am glad to see you, Miss Verdon," he said, adding in a low voice as Vereker started to go upstairs, "I should like a word with you before you go if you can oblige me."

She nodded, and followed her father. His rooms were on the first floor: bedroom and sitting-room with the usual folding doors.

She recognised some of his own things that he used at Leadon Manor. His desk, a couple of big leather chairs, a bad oil painting of a horse that won the Cesarewitch the year her mother was married. Otherwise, the room was of the ordinary "furnished chambers" order and like a particularly ugly diningroom.

There was a mahogany sideboard whereon stood syphons and several medicine bottles. Vereker gravitated there at once and mixed himself a drink which he tossed down at one draught.

Instantly he looked less shrunken and wretched. He sat down in one of the leather chairs and leant over the small smouldering fire, holding out his hands to it, and shivering.

Raby's eyes were rivetted on his hands. They were tremulous and very thin, but they were not dirty.

"Now," he said, without turning his head, "don't pant. Come and stand where I can see you and let me look at you—and take off that frightful hat or whatever it is."

She went and stood on the hearthrug looking down at him, facing him and the grey light coming through the two long windows.

She knew something about illness now, after a year in hospital, and she realised that here was a very sick man.

He lay back in the chair, looking at her with halfclosed eyes. Then he spoke, and the voice was the voice she knew, high-pitched, incisive, mocking.

"I can't make up my mind whether you're as goodlooking as I expected: but you haven't changed much. Have I?"

"You don't look at all well, Father. You're a lot thinner."

"Same old habit of fixing on the obvious. My health can wait at present. What I want to know is, what were you doing in Pall Mall at this time of day? Why aren't you at your hospital?"

"I go on night duty tonight and they always give

you the day when you start."

"Then you ought to be in bed."

"Perhaps, but one can't start sleeping in the afternoons all in a minute. I was lunching with Captain Shaw."

"Was that the sleek, self-conscious parvenu who

had an appointment?"

"Yes, Father, but I don't know why you call him a parvenu. His brother married Mrs. Underwood's daughter, that's how I know him. I've met him often at Casterly. He is . . . a friend of mine."

"I have an idea that he will cease to be a friend of

yours now I've arrived."

"That is quite possible."

"I won't have you running about London with young men, lunching here and there, without 2

chaperon."

Raby smiled a little wearily. "Chaperons are dead as the dodo, Father. You couldn't find one for me if you tried. They became extinct at the beginning of the war."

"So I understand," he said slowly. "All the same

I took a dislike to your friend."

"You hadn't much chance of observing him, had you?"

"He took care of that," Vereker said significantly.

The hot colour flooded Raby's face. She turned hastily, pulled up a chair and sat down beside her father.

"No, not there," he said. "I'd like to have you

where I can see you, now I've got the chance. You

don't appear overjoyed to see me."

"I was so surprised, Father, and it was so wet and everything. Of course, I'm glad you are . . . safely back."

"Are you engaged to that smug-looking fellow?"

"No, Father."

"Has he ever asked you?"

"Never."

"Has anybody?"

She smiled, and the elusive dimple flashed into sight for a fraction of a second. "Not exactly, Father. There really isn't time. Now tell me about you: what have you been doing all this time?"

"My doings," he said grimly, "would not be particularly edifying nor would a catalogue of them be

suitable for the ears of a young woman."

"They might not be edifying, but I'm quite sure they would be interesting: and young women now-adays hear everything discussed."

"What?" he asked suddenly, sitting forward in

his chair. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you want to smoke, Father?"

"Go on," he said, "go on. I'd like to know the

worst. What do you talk about?"

"Oh, everything, from eugenics and psychoanalysis to the Criminal Law Amendment Act. So you see you needn't be nervous."

"Do you mean to tell me you discussed that sort

of thing at school?"

"Oh dear, no. I mean that for the last year I've been on my own and I've heard things and discovered things and thought about things of that sort . . ."

"Yes? And have you come to any conclusions?" "Not very definite; but it seems to me that it's not what's proper or what's improper that matters—only what's clean and what's dirty; but what's dirty may be very interesting all the same. You see, there are so many different kinds of dirt but only one sort of cleanness. Just as there are quantities of diseases but only one health."

"And do the diseases interest you most?"

"I haven't had much to do with diseases—only wounds, you know."

Vereker sat back in his chair. "You're not what I expected," he sighed, "not a bit. I'm not at all sure that I like it."

"I'm sorry, Father, but don't you think I'll bore you less if we can talk things over reasonably. You'll be just as bored with me as when we were at Leadon, if you imagine my mind is shut in a cupboard."

"What," he asked, "has become of reticence?"

"It's rather gone to ground just now: but I expect it'll creep out again when the pack's got on to a fresh line of scent." Raby smiled, the broad smile he remembered so well. "When I came up to Town that's what struck me most—all of 'em, nose down, streaking along after 'sex.' When they've killed and torn it to pieces they'll be less keen. I'm sure it's all because everything has been hushed up so. Don't worry, it will all come right."

She leant over and laid her hand lightly on his wrist: "I shall have to be going soon, Father. Would you let me take your temperature: you seem a bit feverish."

He bounced up in his chair and snatched his hand away. "None of your hanky-panky hospital tricks with me," he exclaimed. "I must think over all you've been saying and try to arrive at some sort of conclusion about you."

"Shall I come first thing tomorrow, when I leave hospital?"

"Certainly not. I shouldn't want to see an angel

from heaven first thing in the morning."

"Shall I come about this time? Will you be in?"
"Come if you like. . . . Ah, here's tea for you.
And, Jenkins, get a taxi for Miss Verdon in half-an-

hour."

He hardly spoke while Raby drank her tea and ate the toasted tea cake Jenkins had brought up. But she felt his eyes upon her all the time. He wouldn't have any tea and asked her if she knew how to mix a cock-tail; but she didn't, and he seemed incapable of going to the sideboard to mix one for himself.

The half-hour was nearly up. Raby went and knelt

down beside his chair.

"If you want me, Father, I'll give them notice at the hospital and come and look after you. I'm not a bad nurse."

"Nurse! What do I want with a nurse?"

"I don't think you're well. And I would see to things... and I am your daughter, you know."

"I begin to be afraid you are," he said, "and I

thought you were your mother's."

"I hope I'm hers too. I've never done anything

very bad, Father, not that she would mind."

She rose from her knees and put on her hat. Jenkins opened the door and announced the taxi. She stooped over her father and kissed him lightly on his hair, saying, "Till tomorrow, then."

Outside on the landing Jenkins was waiting. "The taxi isn't here yet, Miss, but I'm sending for it. May I have a word with you downstairs?"

It seemed that Vereker, with his uncanny intuition for getting and keeping honest servants, had, before

he went to America in the winter of 1913, helped to set up Jenkins in the house in St. James's Place, on condition that he might have the two best rooms in it at any time he pleased. In his absence they could be let. Jenkins married a good cook and prospered, and since the war they had run the four sets of chambers themselves with only such fluctuating assistance as they could find. They didn't "profess" to get any meals for their tenants save breakfast, but were always willing to "oblige" a gentleman at a pinch. And not one of the four set of rooms had ever been vacant for a day.

Vereker had sent Jenkins a telegram when he sailed from New York; and, reluctantly, Jenkins had given notice to the sedate and untroublesome tenant who had had the rooms for two years.

"I wanted Mr. Verdon to send round to you last night, Miss, but he wouldn't let me. But now you've come I'd like to know what he's going to do. He ought to have his own man. I can't give him the attention I ought with all the other gentlemen, and when the arrangement was made he said he'd have his meals at the club—but you know, Miss, he was never the sort of gentleman to move a step if he wasn't so inclined."

"I'm afraid something has happened about the club," Raby said. "He was much upset because the porter said his name wasn't on the books."

"Ah!" and Jenkins shook his head. "He's probably never paid his subscription since he left England. He always was forgetful. I used to have to remind him again and again, and very irritable he used to be. Well, well, we must do our best for the present: but Mrs. Jenkins can't undertake it indefinitely. You understand, Miss, don't you? It isn't

that we want to shirk our responsibilities. Mr. Verdon was a good friend to me: but you can see, Miss, can't you?—that a place of this kind is not quite what is suitable for a gentleman in his state of health. Not what he's used to . . . with the war and all the restrictions about liquor and so forth.—The taxi, Miss.—Then you'll come round tomorrow afternoon? Thank you. Good evening, Miss Verdon."

She had a fairly easy night at the hospital and got back to breakfast with Lulu. A letter from Austin awaited her:

DEAREST RABY,

How I hated to leave you yesterday! But I was already late and you know what it is in these strenuous days. I hope you got the taxi I sent back, I couldn't get one for ever so long. I should have come round last night only I knew you'd be at the hospital. Let me know when and where I can see you. I'm afraid there are breakers ahead, but I hope you will be firm. That sort of thing can be treated successfully now, like most other diseases.

Always yours, A. S.

Lulu watched her as she read it but could make out little from the expression of her face. She laid the letter down, went on eating her breakfast, read it again, tore it into small pieces, placed them neatly in the envelope and the envelope in her pocket. There was never a fire in the flat till evening.

"By the way," Lulu asked, "were you by your-self when you met poor Mr. Verdon?"

CHAPTER XXVI

LETTERS

From Raby Verdon, 12A, Welchester Street, W., to James Chester, Pinnell's End, near Casterly.

Wednesday.

DEAREST MR. CHESTER,

Father has come home and I feel I ought to be with him but don't quite know what to do. He came back last Thursday, but never told me he was coming. I saw him on Friday afternoon. He was in rooms in St. James's Place with Jenkins, our old butler, and looked very ill. I was taking night duty that night and couldn't knock off at a minute's notice. We arranged that I was to go back next afternoon at the same time. So I did, but when I got there Ienkins told me he went away about lunch time for the week-end, and had left enclosed letter for me. I could see Jenkins was anxious and thought he wasn't fit to go; but you know what father is and how no one can stop him if he has made up his mind. Jenkins packed a suit case for him, and would have gone to the station to get his ticket, but father wouldn't let him and said he'd be back on Monday. No letters were to be forwarded (none have come) and he wouldn't give Tenkins any address because he said he'd be back so soon. This was on Saturday

ind now it's Wednesday and we've heard nothing. I've been to St. James's Place Monday, yesterday ind today in the afternoon. I've told the Commy I nay have to leave at any minute, and why, and she's been awfully decent about it. Jenkins thinks we ought to go to Scotland Yard. Colonel Gray, Gran's nephew, went back, to France this time, on Saturdav. else Lulu would have asked him, he's so clever about mysteries. The most awful thing is that I feel father didn't like me. That everything I did and said was wrong and upset him, and he wanted to get away from me. Yet I did try to be nice to him. It seems so sad he should come home only to vanish away like that. Will you tell me what would be best to do and forgive me bothering you, but you're the only person I know, besides Jenkins, who knows father, except Bates. Love to dear Mrs. Chester and Gran.—When any of you see her, will you tell her about this? And may I have father's letter back?

Your loving RABY.

Everyone is so excited about the prospect of an Armistice—wouldn't it be lovely if it came?

From Vereker Verdon to Raby Verdon.

November 2nd, 1918.

My Dear Raby,

London is too much for me. Everything has changed so incredibly that I can't stand it. I must get out of it, if only for a day or two—where, I don't know. I'll wait till I get to the station and see what

trains there are to some quiet spot. I've told Jenkins I'll be back on Monday, but don't worry if I'm not. I've been considering all that you said and have come to the conclusion that you are probably right—frankness between us would be best if it were possible, but I, at all events, am not equal to the effort as yet. It is probably easier for you to be frank towards one for whom you can feel but small affection, to say nothing of respect, than it is for me: because the men of my time and class, whatever their morals, generally have felt respect of a sort you cannot understand for their own daughters.

Before I came back I had been for over a year under an American doctor and I was decidedly better. Both he and I thought I was cured. I don't mean to imply that I was an amiable, virtuous or useful member of society, but I had my nerves under control. The voyage broke me down. It was an inferno of noise, crowd, discomfort. This combined

with a rough passage fairly did for me.

Now I must go through with it, and I'm not a suitable case for you, my dear. Stick to your hospital for the present. If this Armistice they are talking of materialises, perhaps I'll ask you to come and be with me for a bit. You've never lacked pluck. Yesterday's encounter shows me that you possess courage as well; a different and rarer quality.

Don't worry about me. I shall crop up again

presently.

Give old Jim Chester my love. I'd like to see him once more. I bet he's about the only thing in this God-forsaken country that hasn't changed.

Your affectionate

FATHER.

From Raby Verdon, 12A, Welchester Street, W., to James Chester, Pinnell's End, near Casterly.

Friday.

DEAREST MR. CHESTER,

Your kind letter and one from father came by the same post. He says he is in quite comfortable rooms in Torquay and will stay there for the present. He doesn't want me and says he's just about the same. If you think I should go after him I will: but if he shut the door on me what could I do? Yet I feel he ought not to be there alone. I wish Jenkins could have gone with him, but of course he couldn't. Father ought to have a servant of his own. He has never been without one in his life. He had a very good one in America—he told Jenkins so. I am still on night duty, and I'm glad, because then I can be here all day in case a telegram comes.

Your loving RABY.

From James Chester to Raby Verdon.

November 9th, 1918.

MY DEAR RABY,

At present I think it is best to leave your father to do as he likes. It is always more or less impossible to arrange things for anybody else, above all for a man of his temperament. If I know him at all he will soon become very bored with rooms in Torquay. Now that you know his whereabouts a telegram would bring you to him in a few hours if he needs you. And, remember this, a telegram or trunk call will bring me. Don't hesitate for a moment if you want me. I quite feel with you that some responsible person should be with him, but I am not at all sure you are that person.

I agree with your father that for the present you should stick to the hospital. It looks as if there may be no need for so many hospitals soon—then you'll be free to do as you think best.

Love from my wife and yours affectionately,

J. CHESTER.

From Austin Shaw, 78, Hammon Chambers, Jermyn Street, W., to Raby Verdon.

November 9th, 1918.

DEAR RABY,

Why have you not answered my letter?

Yours,

A. S.

From Raby Verdon to Austin Shaw.

Sunday.

DEAR AUSTIN,
Because I had nothing to say.

Yours, R. V.

CHAPTER XXVII

FLINT AND STEEL

BETWEEN six and seven on the evening of the first of February Raby was sitting on her bed at 12A, trying to face facts.

The Armistice with its incredible thankfulness, immeasurable relief and, in London, deliriously joyful excitement, had passed. Beds in the hospitals were already empty, with no probability of their being refilled. And Raby knew that, at any moment now, she might leave and not be missed.

She had seen her father a week ago, for the second time, on his way through London. He had staved for a couple of nights in St. James's Place, looking unspeakably ill. He was irritable and short with her as usual, but he was quite normal; clearheaded and determined. He was going to Market Harborough to see his tenant on some business connected with Markways. When he came back he would decide where she was to join him. In the meantime he advised her to go and stay with the Chesters or Mrs. Underwood for a week or two. She looked fagged. Well, it wasn't he who had worn her out, they couldn't say that. She mustn't imagine that when she did come to him she was going to boss him or give him advice about his health. He knew a jolly sight more about himself than she or anybody else. And he'd have her understand. from the very first, that he was not "a wound case."

His was one of those "diseases" she found so interesting. Well, she'd have the chance of studying it first hand; but he was damned if he was going to let her prescribe for him.

They were not pleasant times she spent with him: but all the same afterwards she endured a poignant sort of self-reproach that she couldn't please him

better.

Just then, she felt, life was curiously flat. The war was over, thank God for that: but with the thanksgiving thought there was mingled "And what am I going to do? Father doesn't want me much. He says he respects me. I wish he'd respect me less and be a little kinder, a little more affectionate. Austin . . ." She had already faced facts about Austin and they were not agreeable facts. It is impossible to come to unfavourable conclusions about anyone you have cared for deeply without the humiliating consciousness that you were a fool, lacking in the selective faculty, without insight, judgment, taste, and no one, above all no one young, can bear the thought that such necessary mental equipment is lacking. It's almost as bad as being told one has no sense of humour—deadliest of insults. It is possible that she might have postponed her verdict upon Austin had it not been that she had such a striking object-lesson before her in the case of Chumleigh Gray.

In a way she was more worried about him than about herself; for she was convinced he was riding for a very bad fall, and she liked him. Always when thinking of him a line of poetry she had heard or read and couldn't place sang in her mind:

[&]quot;We are most hopeless, who had once most hope, And most beliefless, who had most believed."

That was the difference between her and Chumleigh. For some time past she had hoped very little of Austin. Since he left her standing on the pavement with her father she believed nothing. She couldn't cease caring for him yet. But now she knew.

Chumleigh Gray went gaily on in his fool's paradise; because, in spite of all Lulu's vacillations and confessions, he yet hoped and believed. And the

awakening was just about due.

"The confounded doctors," he wrote to Lulu, "insist that I must take at least three month's leave," and he was coming home to take it. He'd go down to his aunt in the country and she must chuck the Ministry and come too. Then they could arrange about getting married directly after Easter. She had always promised him she'd tell him definitely on the 10th of February. Well, he was coming home on the 7th. Then followed jubilations and protestations which wrung Raby's heart when Lulu read them aloud. How silly he was. How like an eager boy—over this. How clear-minded and level-headed over most things. But kind, always kind.

"Why don't you tell him before he comes back?" Raby had asked indignantly, as she and Lulu sat over the fire the night before. "Why make him wait till the 8th when you know what you are going to do

now?"

"I daren't tell him while he's out there," Lulu declared piteously. "You see, he's ill. That's where the poor dear is so tiresome. He's always ill and one is so handicapped."

"But surely if he's ill that's all the more reason to put him out of his misery. Lulu, are you sure you

won't marry him after all?"

Lulu shook her head. "No," she said slowly, "I

know you think badly of me-you don't know how I suffer—it's very difficult for people who see all round a thing, as I do; and when Chum's here, he's so masterful—he won't listen—but he wears me out. He expects too much. Now I know I can make Sir Harry happy. He's simple and easily pleased Now Chum's not a bit like that. He's like a flint, always wanting to strike sparks out of your mind. It's too tiring. I realise now I had no right to tell Chum I'd marry him, when I wasn't really free. I must do the straight thing by Sir Harry, because he's such a wonderful character. I'm torn with sorrow for Chum-you don't believe me, but I am. Life hasn't been at all easy for me of late and you make it more difficult by taking up such a hostile attitude about Sir Harry."

"I shouldn't have been hostile about Sir Harry if

you'd been straight with Chum from the first."
"How could I be when I wasn't sure myself? I'm

"How could I be when I wasn't sure myself? I'm always completely over-ridden by what Chum thinks when he's there."

"He'll be there again in a week. What then?"

"I dread it unspeakably," Lulu said, "but it wouldn't be fair to tell him in a letter. He might do anything—out there."

"It seems to me," Raby said bitterly, "that if

Chum's a flint, you're a bit of wood."

"Dear Raby," Lulu said sweetly, "I know I've got my affairs into an awful tangle: but, dear, think . . . you haven't yet had quite the same temptations—have you?"

Lulu never gave "railing for railing," but the soft

answer does not invariably turn away wrath.

"You're exactly like Tamar," Raby said bitterly. "You wave your scarf and then when you've had

enough of them you throw the bodies into a lake of oblivion."

"Well, I can't marry them all, can I?" asked Lulu.

Things were not altogether smooth between Raby and Lulu just then: and they always met in the evenings, for Lulu was out very little.

The flat seemed strangely deserted without any

cheerful male visitors.

The girls cooked their dinner together. Lulu sewed industriously, making the loveliest "undies."

They even ceased to discuss the Pinsent-Gray situation.

Lulu was unfailingly sweet and gentle. Raby awkwardly polite. It was most uncomfortable. "I don't seem even to have Lulu left," Raby reflected sadly.

She had just reached Welchester Street on her way home from hospital. She was tired and discouraged, but she had loved the men and was sad that it was all to end so soon. This was Saturday. She was to leave the hospital on the following Wednesday.

The door of number 12A was opened and a man came out. It was Chumleigh Gray, and when Raby saw his face she put herself right in his path so that he couldn't pass her.

"Where are you going, Colonel Gray?" she asked. He looked at her. "To the devil," he said briefly, and made to pass her.

"So it's come? She has decided at last?"

"She has decided at last—and I've got the chuck."

Again he tried to pass her. Raby turned and went with him.

"I'm miserable too," she said. "Will you take

me somewhere and give me a cup of tea?"

"I'm not fit company for anyone, Miss Verdon. I know you mean most kindly—but you'd better leave me."

"I won't bother you long," she said, "but it will be very good of you to bear with me for a little while."

"Come on then," he said. "We'll go somewhere."

There was a quiet little tea-shop upstairs in upper Baker Street. They were late and it was almost

empty.

He sat at the table leaning his head on his hand and Raby's heart ached at the misery in his face. He looked so gravely ill, too. So thin and worn and haggard.

"Did you know she was going to do this?" he

asked.

"I feared it."

"I suppose you think me an awful fool ever to have submitted to any ambiguous arrangement of the kind?"

"I've been precisely the same sort of fool myself. So I can understand."

"You! You mean someone has turned you down?"

"Someone has turned me down . . . and it hurts. Oh, it hurts horribly."

Two big tears rolled down Raby's cheeks. They were not wholly for herself. "So, you see, I can understand," she muttered.

"But why? I don't understand . . . how could anyone . . . what happened?"

"I suppose he found, just what Lulu has found,

that I'm not the sort he wants. . . . It's a bit of a comedown, isn't it?"

"The man's a fool," he said indignantly.

"No, that's just what he's not. I'm sure he's right... I shouldn't have suited him. Do drink your tea—is it awfully strong?"

"I believe," he said musingly, "that if I hadn't been such a seedy, nervous wreck I might have pulled

it off. I got on her nerves, I fear."

"It's quite likely—Lulu can't bear sick people."

"That's a bit unfortunate just now, when there are such a lot of crocks going about. Is that other chap—Sir Harry Thingumy—awfully robust?"

"I've only just seen him: he looks all right. didn't even know about him till you came such a lot . . . but she says he's not clever like you . . . she calls him a 'Hughie man'—and you're not, you know."

"I'm ninety-nine-sorts-of-a-born-fool man, it seems to me. I suppose if I'd had any sense at all or any pride I'd have chucked the whole thing long ago. You mustn't think I didn't know I was a fool. All the time I knew—I was never happy—I never really trusted her and yet, while there was the faintest chance—I couldn't go."

"I don't see how one can be proud if one cares. I know I wasn't."

"I can't understand about you. With me it's different, I'm no particular catch and I'm too nervy and run down to be really good company. But you . . . does it hurt you to tell me? . . . is it cheek of me to ask?"

"I suppose," Raby said simply, "we can talk to each other because we're both in the same boat. You see, I'm no great catch either, not clever and

with a queer father . . . but it wasn't all because of him. I do things without thinking and I can't give people up."

"Good God! That's what one wants surely.

The not giving up, I mean. The man's an ass."

"There's no subtlety about me. I'm too downright, too commonplace. He's clever—like you..."

"He's not a bit like me. I deny it. I may be a

poor sort of chap in lots of ways, but . . . "

"You know then? Did Lulu tell you I liked him? I've never told her."

He coloured. "You see, I've seen you together." "Did I show? I've always tried not to."

"You didn't, but he did."

"I'm glad of that. It makes me feel less of a worm. But you mustn't run away with any wrong idea. There never was anything definite. Nothing like the same reason for me to be upset as for you. I mean not so much ground. Only one hopes."

He looked a shade less haggard. His tragic eyes were wonderfully kind as they met hers: "I say

again the man's an ass."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know and I don't care. I shall clear out of this for a bit, anyhow. What are you going to do?"

"I expect I'll have to look after my father and he's very erratic, but he's ill, too, poor man. No more tea? It was strong, wasn't it? but it's done me good, and I'm grateful to you for letting me come."

Outside the tea-shop she held out her hand: "Good-bye, Colonel Gray. Perhaps we'll meet again some time, when we're less under the weather."

"Mayn't I walk back with you?"

"No thanks, not now. I don't think Welchester Street's healthy for you just now."

She had turned into Marylebone Road when she heard hasty steps behind her. It was Chumleigh Gray. "Be tender with her," he said, "she's badly upset. Be kind to her, won't you?"

"I'll try," Raby answered.

"Remember, you said you can't give people up." He walked away quickly. He was miserable; but perhaps not quite so miserable as he was an hour ago.

Raby let herself into the flat with the stern determination to tell Lulu what she thought of her. First Pinkie and now this Colonel Gray in less than twelve months, and heaven only knew how many before.

She went straight to her room, took off her hat and changed her boots; and then into the sitting-room, full of righteous indignation.

Lulu was lying on the sofa in a crumpled heap,

crying bitterly.

"Oh, Raby darling," she sobbed, "I've been having such a dreadful, dreadful scene with Chum. It has utterly shattered me. I had to tell him, and it was awful. He wasn't like Pinkie. He wasn't rude and recriminating but he looked like stone... and I thought he was going to faint or something. Oh, Raby, I'm so cold and the fire has gone out, and I've had no tea. Do you think you could make some? Oh dear, oh dear! There was never such an unfortunate girl as me."

Raby made the fire again, boiled the kettle on the gas stove, and took Lulu tea—she refused any bread and butter—and stood by her while she gurgled and

sobbed and dropped salt tears into it.

"I wouldn't mind so much," Lulu gasped between her sobs, "if only they'd be friends afterwards. I want to be friends with everbody. I can't bear quarrelling. It's so . . . vulgar." "From what you say, Colonel Gray didn't quarrel with you."

"No, but he was final. I know I shan't see him again. I don't suppose he'll come to my wedding or

anything, and I do like him so much."

Raby sat down and stared at Lulu. She was undoubtedly much upset. Her pretty face was swollen and distorted by crying, and she hardly ever cried. And she was grieved because Chumleigh Gray wouldn't come to her wedding! Raby's brain refused to grasp the situation and she went to the kitchen. Lulu declined any dinner. She had a hot bath and some bovril in bed, followed by an aspirin.

She refused to be comforted and Raby began to

feel quite sorry for her.

Worn out by all these disintegrating emotions she, at last, went to bed herself.

But not to sleep. Whenever she shut her eyes

Chumleigh Gray's tragic eyes held her.

At midnight she crossed the passage softly and listened outside Lulu's door. All was quiet. The door was not latched and she pushed it open a little and listened. She heard soft, regular breathing.

Wherever he was, she was sure Chumleigh Gray

was not asleep.

That night she forebore to set her alarm clock. It might wake Lulu; and even if one was a little late at the hospital it didn't matter so much now.

Nothing seemed to matter very much now.

What an ungrateful thing to say and the war over! Raby gave the pillow a thump and tried a new position.

The haunting eyes looked into hers: looked and looked . . . and Raby, too, slept.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BRIDGE HOLDS

CHUMLEIGH GRAY went down to little Leadon the day after his final interview with Lulu.

Gran had mothered him one year she was home on leave with her husband, the year his own mother died when he was twelve. He had seen Gran but seldom since. Yet she had never altogether passed from his memory. Since the war he had seen her once in London and once, for a short week-end, at Casterly; and they had taken up their relationship very much

where they had left it.

Chumleigh was not like Raby. Expression was easy to him. Moreover it was necessary. When he was well and Fate was kind he bubbled over with high spirits. When he was ill he bore it stoically enough, but he was irritable and depressed. When he was hurt in his heart he needed a kind hand with a salve. He could not, like Raby, creep into a dark corner of his soul and hide his bruises. He wanted them dressed by the right person. He was generally accounted a strong man, but he was not a silent one. He felt, just then, that if he couldn't talk this thing out with a sane and sympathetic listener, he would go mad. Therefore he rushed down to Casterly: and, for three nights running, kept Gran up till one in the morning going over all the prog and cons

and whys and wherefores of his stormy and disastrous courtship.

Luckily Cicely was away. She bored him with her gentle platitudes and complacent, cut-and-dried views about the war, society and, above all, by her strictures on modern youth in general. He was always charming to her and she admired him very much. He was supremely thankful she had gone to stay with her mother-in-law and taken the children with her.

The weather was mild and wet. He hired a horse and rode in the Leadon Woods. He was very miserable. Now and again he spared a little pity for that Verdon child. Curious how her eyes haunted one. The sort of eyes that were deep wells of truth. She would never go back on anyone. He was sure of that. It was fine of her, too, that she had been so frank. He had insight enough to know that expression didn't come easy to Raby.

Lulu's eyes were not her strong point. They were rather small and her eyebrows were smudgy. That was why one always saw Lulu's profile in one's mind. Her profile was exquisite. Her head was so perfectly set.

When he got back to Town he'd ask that Verdon

child to dine with him.

He got wet through, rode home to slowly in a cold wind and was thoroughly chilled. His temperature rushed up, and Gran sent for the Casterly doctor, who ordered bed for at least a week: "He ought to stay there six, but we'll see what a week will do."

Raby hurried back from hospital to see how Lulu was bearing up. She found her pale and tear-stained,

but quite calm, sewing insertion into lemon-coloured silk. Silk that Chumleigh had given her.

"I got Mrs. Root to telephone to the Ministry this morning that I was too ill to go: besides, look at me! Do you think my eyes will ever come right?"

"Have you heard from General Pinsent?" Raby

asked unsympathetically.

"Yes; of course. He writes every day. He's coming next week, and that reminds me, Raby. Are you going down to Casterly, as your father suggested? I know you've paid your share of the rent up to Christmas, but I wondered . . . if you are going then whether you'd go a little sooner, and let mother come up and have your room. She wants to do some shopping . . . and it would be useful to have her here when it's all announced. She'll be most awfully pleased."

"I haven't written to the Chesters to ask if they can have me. I know they're awfully crowded just now with five of the grand-children, and Tony's widow, besides those two convalescent officers—I

hardly like to ask them."

"What about Mrs. Underwood?"

"She's got her daughter and the children. I thought I'd wait to: father. He'll surely settle

something this week."

"Oh, well then, mother must go to an hotel," Lulu said amiably, "only we're so hard up it would have been a help to her. Perhaps she could have my room: and I'll sleep on the sofa in here—but it's awkward with Harry coming."

"I'll telegraph to father and ask him if I may go to him at once. I haven't written to Mrs. Under-

wood for ages: 1 can't bother her just now."

"After this month," Lulu held up her work to

look at it, "I'm going to let the flat to two girls in the Ministry. I've sent in my resignation and I shall leave in about another week. Shall you want your furniture?"

Lulu had made up her mind that Raby was to be out of the flat before Sir Harry Pinsent came on leave.

She was beginning to find her something of a bore. She was a constant reminder that she, Lulu, had turned her back upon Romance. What was to come might be comfortable, sane, easy: but never again would she be swept off her feet in that measure which had been entrancing while it lasted. Only she couldn't keep it up. But there were those who, when they ceased to dance, could fall into step and march comfortably side by side. She could never have walked in step with Chumleigh Gray. He walked too fast for her, and chose hilly, rock-strewn paths: and where he led there would his woman have to follow. He was that sort.

That's why Lulu wanted Raby to go. As long as she was there, however thoroughly one turned one's back, it was impossible to help looking behind over one's shoulder now and then.

It was unsettling.

Raby's telegram to her father came back to her. He had gone from the hotel the day before and left no address. Jenkins had heard nothing.

She had said good-bye to them at the hospital. Jane Walton had sent in her name for good work. The flat, with nothing to do but wait for knocks and rings and possible telegrams, became intolerable.

A sudden poignant nostalgia seized her. A passionate longing for the fragrance of wet grass; for clean, keen air that did not smell of petrol; for kind

ople who were not going to marry Generals; who d not talk of all the other people who had "wanted marry them."

Just as she had once fled from Miss Gransmore st she should do her a mischief; so, now, she ecided she must go away, if only for a night, lest ne should be irretrievably unkind to Lulu. This verwhelming desire came upon her about half-past x, when Lulu was already dressing to go out to dine nd do a theatre with friends. Lulu felt she needed little distraction.

Raby knew the trains to Casterly by heart. There as nothing after the six o'clock from Paddington, ut there was a train at nine which reached Jackanen's Junction, four miles from Casterly, at half-past leven.

She'd walk those four familiar miles and if, by hance, as sometimes happened, Gran had left a indow open downstairs, she'd creep in without waking anybody. If it was all shut up she'd ring. Gran rouldn't be cross. She'd understand. After all, her ather had told her to go to Casterly. She could leep anywhere. She'd leave word with Jenkins there she was, and a note for Lulu begging her to end on any telegram at once. Then Mrs. Lane-larding could have her bed.

She packed a suit-case and put a tooth-brush and omb in her pocket: for the suit-case must wait at he junction till tomorrow. She left everything very dy in her room, and put her latch key and money for he week's housekeeping in with the note for Lulu. Then, carrying her suit-case, she slammed the door f the flat behind her.

She picked up a taxi at Baker Street and had just nough money left for a third-class ticket at Padding-

ton. The train, as always, was packed, but Raby's spirits rose with every mile that London was left behind. Presently she began to be extremely hungry. She had forgotten all about dinner. There had been so much to do.

She had nothing to read, and lay back in the corner thinking. Life stretched out before her, just then rather flat and uninteresting. It wouldn't be peaceful with her father, but someone else's whims and fancies may become monotonous, as she had reason to know in childhood.

She thought of Austin. Austin, radiant, and beautiful, with wind-blown hair, in Casterly Woods. Austin, grave and important in khaki. Austin, deliciously possessive and dictatorial when she first came to London. She was so proud that Austin cared for her. Austin, who had never bowed the knee to Lulu; who was so fastidious—it had seemed so wonderful. And now——

The train stopped. She woke with a start and let down the window. Yes: someone was calling

"Jackamen's Junction!"

She was the only passenger on the long platform. She and one sleepy porter with a lamp. Not the old porter who knew her. Yes: he'd put the suit-case "somewhere safe till marnin'." Had she far to go—'twas a darkish night.

It was also an extremely cold night, with an occasional flutter of snow; but she lifted her face joyously to the clean cold air as she swung out of the station. She had on thick, high boots and carried an umbrella, but she wouldn't open it yet. The snow was delicious. Besides she always had hated umbrellas.

How surprised Gran would be!

The snow ceased and the moon came out from

behind a cloud. Not a soul anywhere. Presently, in a road sunk between two high banks, a fox bent on some nocturnal expedition trotted across right in front of her.

Raby's heart leapt. This was home.

The road into Casterly is long and straight and dull. Lord Leadon's park lies along one side: on the other, great fields that join the downs. Never a house for a matter of three miles.

She fell to thinking about Gran and why it was so easy to tell her things. This time, she'd tell her about Austin. It was all over now, so it didn't matter. Gran often didn't see eye to eye with you, but she recognised you had a right to your own opinion. Not like Aunt Emily and Aunt Alice, who always decided beforehand that anything you did or thought must be wrong, because you were young. Or father, who would like you shut in a mental sort of tower. Her heart began to beat faster. She had reached the little town. Not a light anywhere. Good little old town so sound asleep.

At last she turned into the Roman Road. The moon was shining again. The gabled houses loomed dimly white. She had reached the gate.

If Bannister had been there she wouldn't have had a ghost of a chance to burgle her way in. He was such a one for locking everything, and barring shutters, and he never trusted to Gran to do it: but maids—maids were different.

They were. The drawing-room window was unshuttered and open at the top.

Would the window squeak as she pushed it up?

Just a little: but there was no sound inside the house.

Raby swung her legs over and was in, and—bles-

sings upon them! the fire was not quite out. But,

oh dear, how hungry she was!

She switched on one of the lights and took of her wet, muddy boots. Then across the hall to the dining-room. There used to be biscuits always in a silver box on the sideboard. Joy! There were three, and they were very stale.

She munched them and helped herself to soda water from a siphon on the sideboard. . . . What

a noise it made!

She put her boots outside the drawing-room door just to break it to them gently that someone had arrived. She took off her wet coat and her dress and hung them on a chair before the fire.

She let down her hair, said her prayers, switched off the light and lay down on the big old chesterfield; pulled the rug up over her, and longed for Wuffles to cuddle. Wuffles had fallen to pieces three years ago and his remains were buried over at Pinnell's End. A lavender bush marked the resting-place of Wuffles.

How easy it was to burgle a house!

Had Gran taken to smoking that there were two boxes of Asorbal cigarettes on the mantelpiece? How she wished she dare smoke one, but the smell would wake Gran. She knew it would . . . what a comfortable sofa . . .

He had been in bed five days. The fever had left him and he was rested somewhat and not unwilling to lie still. He devoured two novels a day and talked to Gran for hours. Sleep came to him for the first part of the night now, but he still woke confoundedly early and lay awake thinking of all the things he had said and done that might have "put Lulu off." Of all he had left undone that might have bound her to him.

Only four o'clock, and he had been awake two Something had roused him. He had fancied he heard someone moving in the hall and sat up in bed to listen. These old houses were always creaking and he was in the oldest part of the house, where the walls were two feet thick. A long, low room down four steep steps, with a great oak beam along the centre of the ceiling.

He had a lamp beside his bed and a pile of books, but he had read them every one. After all, the doctor hadn't said he was never to get out of bed. There were two book-cases in the drawing-room and he hadn't really investigated either of them. He'd creep down softly with a candle, then the click of the switches wouldn't wake Gran. It was a sound like a switch being turned that roused him. His room was over the dining-room.

A tall, gaunt unshaven figure in paisley-patterned dressing-gown, he stood unsteadily lighting the candle. It was extraordinary how weak these goes of fever left one.

He negotiated the four steep steps to the landing without a sound. Yes, Gran's door was shut. Good. He'd passed it and was down the front stairs and she hadn't called as he feared and expected, "Chum, do you want anything I can get you?" Good soul, Gran. One of the best. If he had to go through with this misery: better here than anywhere.

A candle gave very little light, but he could see the backs of the books with it. The door was not shut-

another possible noise saved.

He went in very quietly. The chesterfield was by the side of the fire facing the door. By jove, they'd left the window open.

He nearly dropped the candle, saved it, shaded it with his hand and gazed and gazed.

What would he not give to sleep like that?

Her bare arm, slender and white, lay outside the rug. Long brown hair lifted out of the way billowed over the cushions behind her as though blown by the wind. Such a grave young face, with soft shadows under the eyes in that dim light. Too thin, like her arms, with broad thoughtful forehead, the oval of cheeks and chin too sharp: but kind and gentle and unlined between the delicate level brows.

There is always something rather pathetic in unconsciousness.

What could have happened? Why had she come like this?

Then he had heard something! Instantly Chum was warmed through by that supremely conceited satisfaction that comes to those who have successfully traced a mysterious noise.

He was glad to see her, too. Little Leadon might be an excellent place to convalesce in, but it was, just

then, a trifle dull.

Raby opened her eyes.

Was she dreaming?

The light from the candle shaded by his hand (such a thin hand—the light shone right through it) was thrown upwards, foreshortening his face, which, unshaved just then, looked particularly haggard.

She lay quite still, staring up at him.

He smiled down at her and laid the candle on a table.

"What," he asked, "are you doing here?"

"Sleeping as good as gold till you came and woke me. What are you doing here?"

"Being ill, as usual. I've been in bed nearly a week."

Raby sat up. "In bed! Then why aren't you

there now instead of wandering about the house? Go back directly."

"Mayn't I stay and talk to you?"

"Certainly not. Off you go, else I'll get up and carry you. I believe I could."

"Just before I go, tell me this: what made you

come 'so suddin-like'?"

"Things got on top of me and I knew if I stayed I'd be beastly to Lulu. So I just came to the most soothing person I know."

"No one has ever called me soothing before,"

Chumleigh murmured, "I do appreciate it."

"You! That's the last thing one would say of you. I had no idea you were here—and now I suppose there's no room for me!"

"There's plenty of room. Cicely and the children are away. You've just come in time to help me

convalesce."

"Will you go back to bed?"

At the door he paused. "What a lot of hair you've got, grandmother," he whispered.

On the stairs he met Gran, who asked, "Who has

come? And why are you out of bed?"

The weather was atrocious. It snowed and rained alternately and when it was doing neither, icy blasts effectively extinguished any hopes Chumleigh had of being allowed to go out.

It was warm in the sturdy stone-built house—John Gray had seen to that—and the doctor allowed Chumleigh to get up. He and Raby were thrown much together, for Gran was busy with many things that had been neglected while he was ill.

She had been at Little Leadon five days when she discovered that she was singularly happy. There

seemed a special and extraordinary zest in everything she did: even the simplest things. Occasionally she would pull herself up and try to worry about her father — and then forget that he existed.

Such little things gave her this warm thrillmaking beds with the maid and teaching her the hospital way. Winding wool for Gran while Chumleigh held it. Mending her stockings while Chumleigh lay on the sofa, and watched her, and talked. Kneeling in front of the fire to pile logs upon it because he was always cold. Watching the flames leap, while the wind howled outside and soft snowflakes fluttered against the windows. Going out in all the weathers to do messages in the little town: to the shops where friendly tradesmen knew her and greeted her as a person, not a mere customer. Going over to lunch with the Chesters when they sent the dog-cart for her -she thought more about her father then, because Mr. Chester seemed uneasy and asked many questions which she could not answer. Coming back to Little Leadon to a cross and huffy Chumleigh because she had been away so long. And next day, just before dinner, the Summons.

A trunk call from Jenkins. Would she please come as soon as possible. Mr. Verdon came back that afternoon and was evidently most dangerously ill. Yes: Jenkins sent for a doctor at once who had been to another gentleman in the rooms who was similarly took sudden. Yes: the doctor had taken him to a nursing home there and then—arranged it all by telephone.

He strongly advised Miss Verdon to come up by the first possible train. He thought most seriously of the case. Double pneumonia. Again Raby went by the mail train from Jackamen's Junction, but this time Jim Chester went with her.

CHAPTER XXIX

AN END AND A BEGINNING

STRANGE, dream-like, dreary days, while she sat by her father's bed and he grasped one of her hands in a feverish clutch.

Sometimes he knew her, as often not, but always he was less restless if she was there.

In the nursing home they were not sympathetic. Double pneumonia was bad enough by itself, but complicated with nerves and a constitution already ruined by drugs, it was a difficult case. A wearing case that could only have one end: and they hate deaths in nursing homes.

It saved them a great deal of trouble to have Raby there, therefore they raised no objection to her constant presence, and even let her have a little room in the house. She knew quite as much about nursing, as either of the nurses told off for her father's case, and she did not irritate him to the same extent. If he was violent and cried out, it was apt to disturb other patients. She could generally stop that: therefore was she with him practically day and night.

Over and over again the weak, tired voice repeated certain lines:—

"Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won Others to sin, and made my sin their door?

"Not Raby, Anne, not little Raby. I've kept her out of it always. Truly I've kept her clear of it.

"Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun A year or two, but wallowed in a score? When thou has done, thou hast not done, For I have more."

The tired voice would fall silent only to repeat again, "When thou has done, thou hast not done, for I have more."

Sometimes he seemed to be talking to her mother, sometimes to the God that every human soul seeks, when the body is sunk deep in the shadow of death. Sometimes he knew her and implored her, pitifully, not to leave him. At such times Raby suffered torments of self-reproach. While she was happy at the hospital or, later, at Casterly, he had wanted her and he had done without her. With that power of facing realities, which had never wholly failed him, even when he had sunk lowest—he knew that he was no fit companion for a young girl.

"My kinsfolk have failed and my familiar friends have forgotten me. . . . I am an alien in their sight . . . I called my servant and he gave me no answer. I did, Raby. I called and called, and those impudent women wouldn't listen. Nobody will listen. Nobody will listen."

"I'm listening, father, I'm here with you. See—I'm holding your hand. I won't leave you for a minute."

Kind Jim Chester came and sat by the bed, but Vereker did not know him. Then one day came William Vereker, his brother. Grey-haired and portly and decorous. Precise of speech, talking in the amiable clichés Vereker had always hated: but kindly withal, and touched to sudden sympathy when he saw Raby, patient and solitary, keeping her long watch.

A week. A restless, tormented, agonising week.

It seemed to her, holding the hot, fluttering hand, that the tired voice repeated volumes of poetry and the whole Book of Job. That was when he was quieter. When he raved, she tried to close her ears. Always, whatever he said, whatever he quoted, dozens of times a day the lines recurred:

"Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won Others to sin, and made my sin their door?

He seldom recovered full consciousness, though sometimes after they had given him oxygen he knew her, would look at her with the old whimsical, appraising eyes; and tell her she was pale, too pale, and ought to go out for a ride. Then he would clutch at her and implore her not to leave him.

In the early morning after a terribly restless night he seemed quieter. She sat beside him holding his hand, and it was only when it grew quite still within her own that she knew.

So Vereker Verdon slept with his fathers, for his ashes were taken to Markways and buried in the family vault.

He had left singularly explicit directions as to what was to be done, both with the family lawyer and with Jenkins. It seemed that the American doctor, who had weaned him from certain of his more evil habits, had warned him he might go out at any minute; and he wanted to die at home.

Considering the erratic, forgetful, careless man he had always been, his final dispositions were lucid and businesslike; and his affairs in better order than Jim Chester, who knew more about them than anybody, had dared to hope.

He had speculated rather successfully during that

last, sane year in America; had sent the money home while the exchange was so advantageous, and it was all invested in gilt-edged securities or War Loan.

Markways and its rent of course went to William Verdon and his elder son after him. The lease had still six years to run and the wealthy and excellent tenant ardently desired to extend it. Raby, instead of being penniless, as Jim Chester had feared, would have rather over three hundred a year, and he was appointed sole trustee and guardian till she came of age.

She was very miserable. Although she could not truly say she had ever been fond of her father, she had always hoped, with the vague optimism of youth, that when she was grown-up they would "get on" better. That she would not bore him.

In that first interview after their long separation she had, with girlish swank, tried to show him how grown-up she was: how modern and advanced; how capable of discussing anything: an all-round, upto-date young person who would be an amusing companion.

Really young and simple, she was now overwhelmed with remorse at having "put him off." He had not wanted her to be like that. She had shocked her father who had always seemed so un-shockable.

It was a cruel retrospect to feel that she was such a disappointment to him: that it had driven him into the wilderness to get away from her.

Because she was not what he had hoped and believed she might be.

All this time he had been planning and saving for her; only to find she was a dreadful girl that he couldn't "respect."

She told nobody; and ate her heart out in secret in

an absurd but entirely sincere repentance for sins that she had never committed.

At the Chesters there was always plenty to do. Fewer servants in the house and an endless succession of soldier guests besides the family. Before the Armistice convalescing officers. Now, officers from overseas interested in seeing something of English country life and agriculture.

A couple of extra horses were in the stables now, and kind Jim Chester sent Raby to ride with his guests and show them something of the neighborhood.

She began to look less thin and fagged; and even Vereker Verdon would have been satisfied with her complexion. Always she had the sense of waiting for something. Waiting quite patiently and contentedly, but with definite and delightful expectation—vague, intangible, delicious.

About six o'clock on the fourth of April the tele-

phone bell rang, and she went to answer it.

"Yes: it is Miss Verdon speaking. What! You! When did you come? Tomorrow at the Park Gates at eleven? Yes: I think so, if I may have one of the horses. Hold the line and I'll ask Mr. Chester. . . . Hullo! Are you there? Yes: I may. Right-o!—at eleven."

What a delicious April morning on that good Saturday! In the air the indescribable, clean smell of young leaves and growing grass. March had been a horrible month, cold and boisterous and wet. Today the sun shone, the birds sang, and the young horse she rode was fresh as the day itself. She was conscious of a curiously clear perception of everything that went to make the beauty of the kind, pastoral

country. The ragged hedges with their veil of tender green. The white magic of patches of flowering thorn; the thrust and spring of the young horse under her. A couple of yellowhammers flashing in the hedge: a waggon with two great horses so wise and grave and strong passed her on the road.

A tightening came in her throat and a mist before her eyes, for this was England, and the war was

over.

She cantered on the grass at the sides of the road till she reached the outskirts of the town: then to a shop or two with the inevitable commissions that no one, going to the little town from Pinnell's End, ever escaped.

The clock on the church was chiming eleven as she

rode up the hill into the park.

Chumleigh was there, waiting for her on a fidgety hireling with a hard mouth: but she felt no qualms

about his power to keep his seat.

Should she live to be an old, old woman, she will always remember that April morning when she rode to meet Chumleigh Gray. The picture of him, as he waited for her just inside the great gates, is imprinted on her mind with the detailed sharpness of a photograph taken in a strong light.

His thick grey hair, his dear whimsical sallow face; the deep wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, those kind large eyes that she could always see when she

shut her own.

And he looked uncommonly glad to see her.

They rode far into the park, and when it rained, and of course it rained after such a fine early morning, they sheltered in one of two stone lodges with an open front that local people call the "Horse Guards."

"Raby," he said, "you know all about me. You saw me right through that infatuation. Can you believe me when I tell you what I feel for you? Can you?"

"But you don't know about me," she said. "I was infatuated, too, and—I'm afraid—I'm not really good. I disappointed father. I feel I've no busi-

ness to be happy so soon . . . but I am!"

"I'm a lonely chap and restless. I hate the Army, really, and shall leave it the very first minute they'll let me. Will you come with me when I start on the long trail again?—would you like it?"

"Is it difficult to ride camels? Could I, do you

think?"

The fidgety horse with the hard mouth really behaved very well on the whole, for they kept him standing quite a long time. The shower passed over. A new green sparkling world surrounded them; the sun hoisted a rainbow in the sky in their honour—and they didn't notice any of it.

"How easily arms go round waists in Fairy Land," and what a wonderfully comprehensive word is the

pronoun WE.

They were very late for lunch at Little Leadon, but

Gran forgave them on sight.

It is wonderful to be young and in love, with life stretching wide and splendid in front of you. But it is good also to be middle-aged, to understand and to remember.

Because if you understand you are allowed sometimes to go back to the land where the light is always golden: to go back across the bridge you have helped to build.



•





